Annual
Subscription
in North America
$40

# BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Quarterly Information Bulletin (ISSN 1064-7716)
Published by Belarusan-American Association, Inc.
a fraternal nonprofit association
Managing Editor: P.O. Box 10353, Torrance, CA 90505 USA
TelFax: (310 ) 373-0793; E-mail: BelReview@aol.com
http://members.aol.com/belreview/index.html

Vol. 11, No. 3 Fall 1999




Boundaries shown on this map are those of the Republic of Belarus, and do not include the entire Belarusian ethnic territory parts of which extend into neighboring states.

1 Editor's Desk
Features
2 U.S. Department of State, Press Statements
3 Eight Human Rights Groups Appeal ...
4 Human Rights Watch Appeal ...
Thoughts and Observations
5 The Belarusian Divide
6 Popular Front faces split over Leadership
7 Political Conflicts in Miensk
9 Lukashenka prefers monologue
Belarus' Forum
10 "Why Lukashenka has to go..."
10 "Youth will yet have its say"
12 Belarusian Government's View
Belarusians Abroad
13 Amb. Wieck's role in launching dialogue
14 Two exiled Belarusian leaders ...
14 BR interview with president of BNR Rada
15 News Briefs
26 Media Watch
27 Letters

## EDITOR'S DESK

### Keeping Belarus from Absorption by Russia

In her July 22 appeal entitled "Let's Put Belarus on the Gore-Stepashin Agenda!" Cathy Fitzpatrick, executive director of the New-York-based International League for Human Rights, wrote: "U.S. officials ignore Belarus because there is 'no domestic constituency.' " And further, ". . . the U.S. puts Belarus on the back burner because officials rarely hear from any Belarusian Americans or Americans of Slavic background on the subject [of the union of Russia and Belarus].

Unfortunately, Belarus is no Israel, Russia, China, or even North Korea, to draw the attention of U.S. policy makers. (The congressional Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe is an exception.) And the resources of Belarusian-Americans are too limited to do effective lobbying to the extent that other ethnic groups can easily muster. We certainly appreciate the help Ms. Fitzpatrick and her organization provide in the area of human rights, as well as those seven human rights organizations that sent a joint letter to Vice President Gore on behalf of Belarus (see FEATURES).

We are trying to do our best with what we have. Our publication, *Belarusian Review*, is produced by volunteers. We receive no subsidies from any sources. For educating the world, we distribute BR to Western institutions, both government and private. This includes governmental and legislative bodies, UN missions, foreign embassies in Washington, and more. And we receive responses, which you can read in our LETTERS column. We have been doing this job for over ten years now.

We would like to add that in every issue of our publication we have covered in depth - both editorially and in news analyses - the subject of the destructive nature of a union of Belarus with Russia since the time the idea was first raised by Łukašenka and Russian politicians. The main point we have been trying to make is that the "union" would deprive Belarus of the "independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity" supposedly guaranteed in a memorandum signed by the presidents of Russia, Belarus, the U.S. and the prime minister of Great Britain in Budapest in December 1994. And we have been pointing out that, contrary to the Budapest assurances, the West is contributing to the demise of Belarus by allowing an uncontrolled flow of Western aid to Russia, which helps Russia subsidize the government of Belarus and pave the way for the country's full absorption.

Regarding Stepashin's visit to Washington, we sent letters to President Clinton, Vice President Gore, senior officials in the Department of State, the chairmen of the U.S. House and Senate foreign relations committees and the CSCE. In response to our letter to Deputy Secretary of State Talbott, the Department of State, in its Aug. 13 letter, said: "Our concerns about Belarus were discussed during the course of Russian Prime Minister Stepashin's visit to Washington last month. These issues will, of course, also continue to be a regular part of our dialogue with the Belarusian government." (See LETTERS.)

Following is the text of our letter sent Mr. Talbott:

"We understand that Vice President Gore will be meeting with Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin on July 27. We believe this will be an excellent opportunity to raise United States' concern about the recent developments in Belarus, which should be

of vital interest to both this country and Russia.

"One of the concerns should be Belarusian President Lukashenka's autocratic rule leading to the abrogation of international human rights agreements as demonstrated by his wholesale crackdown on civic and opposition groups and the independent media.

"The other concern should be the lack of democratic foundations for the current Belarusian executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government. Lukashenka was democratically elected president in 1994 and his legal 5-year term in office came to an end this week on July 20. In 1996, however, Mr. Łukašenka managed to stage what State Department Spokesman James Rubin recently called "a flawed and unconstitutional referendum" to extend his term to 2001 and to disband the legally elected parliament and the legally established constitutional court, replacing both with cronies amenable to his control.

"The third concern should be Messrs. Stepashin's and Lukashenka's efforts to accelerate the absorption of Belarus by Russia. While this might be good politics for both Mr. Stepashin's boss and Mr. Lukashenka, the act itself will be illegal since there is no legal government in place in Belarus to ratify it. In the long run, we think, this alliance would do Russia no good - it would cause damage to Russia's democratic institutions and bring back Soviet-style economic controls. It would not be in the best interests of the US either, since the uncontrolled subsidizing of Russia by the West - which, in turn, enables Russia to subsidize the government of Belarus - provides an incentive and improves the capability for Russia to pursue its goal of restoring its lost empire with Belarus serving as the first link in this chain."

## Congratulations, Belarusian Business Students from Miensk

Members of the Belarusian students team from Miensk were named the best business decision makers in the world when they won the 1999 Hewlett-Packard Global Business Challenge in Brussels on September 9. They defeated 832 teams of students from 43 countries during eight months of competition, and took home $3,000 in U.S. dollars. The event was part of a Junior Achievement International program that teaches young people about the fundamentals of free and open market economies.

The student teams have been 'virtual managers' entering decisions on price, production, distribution, marketing and research and development via computer software that simulates a business. A composite score of retained earnings, market share, growth, productivity, plant capacity, and brand name awareness determined the winner. Belarus' winning strategy involved exporting its product to a market with great demand.

"These were the best-of-the-best Junior Achievement students from around the world," said Lee S. Ting, vice president and managing director of geographic operations for the Hewlett-Packard Company in Palo Alto, Calif. "Hewlett-Packard is proud to sponsor the event." The company is a leading global provider of computing, Internet and Intranet solutions, services, and communications and measurement products. This was the fourth consecutive event it had sponsored.

Other finishers were: Brazil (second place), Argentina (third), Mexico (fourth)., Lithuania (fifth); honorable mention: Lithuania (had two teams), Mexico (had two teams) and Japan.

We are very proud of the Belarusian team. They have shown their good understanding of free market principles. We also hope the Belarusian government, which still operates in the Soviet-style mode, would emulate them.

## Acknowledgments

**Support in Creating BR.** We wish to express our thanks to our friends who helped prepare this issue: Paul Goble and David Marples for contributing articles; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty for permission to reprint copyrighted material; Charter '97, Human Rights Watch and International League for Human Rights for permission to use their material, Bahdan Andrusyshyn, Paula Survilla and Jan Zaprudnik for edit/proofreading; George Stankevich for typesetting and distribution; Joe Pecevich and Dr. Vitaut Romuk for providing source material; and Vaclaū Bahdanovič for reproducing the issue in Belarus.

Joe Price, Editor

# FEATURES

## U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, Press Statements

*Press Statement by James P. Rubin, Spokesman, July 20, 1999*

### Belarus: Presidential Term of Office

The end of Belarusian President Lukashenko's legal term of office today underscores once again the need to resolve the country's constitutional impasse. The Lukashenko regime bears responsibility for this impasse, which resulted from the changes Mr. Lukashenko made to the Belarusian constitution on the basis of a flawed and unconstitutional referendum in 1996. That referendum was widely condemned by the international community. These changes, the arbitrary extension of his term of office beyond July 20, 1999, and his suppression of the voices that rose in protest, have further undermined Lukashenko's democratic legitimacy and betrayed the democratic framework in which he had been elected.

Lukashenko's legitimacy as an elected representative of the Belarusian people can only be restored by free and fair democratic elections in which all political parties can participate on an equal basis. The Supreme Soviet, which the United States and much of the international community continue to recognize as Belarus' sole legitimate parliament, has a right to take its case to the Belarusian people. That right should be respected.

We again call upon the government of Belarus to enter into a dialogue with the opposition without preconditions and to observe internationally-recognized human rights. Only through dialogue and respect for human rights can Belarus return to the path of democracy and resume its place in the international community.

---

*Following is an excerpt from the July 21 Department of State briefing by Mr. James Rubin:*

QUESTION: Mr. Rubin, last night the statement about Belarus was issued. My question is, does this statement mean - (inaudible) -like the United States is going to make some practical measures? Are you going to call back your ambassador from Minsk or impose sanctions on anything else? Thank you.

MR. RUBIN: Well, as a practical matter we will continue to deal with the Lukashenko regime, even though it is our view that he has lost his democratic legitimacy by his changes to the constitution in 1996.

The fact that we'll continue to deal with him on a de facto basis, in our view, does not legitimize him. President Lukashenko's lack of respect for human rights and democracy has long been an impediment in our bilateral relations. Until there is improvement in this area, our policy of selective engagement will remain very much in effect.

We have made some progress on the issue of the ambassador's residence; the government seizure of which gave the impetus for our recalling of Ambassador Speckhard. We have begun to discuss the issue of compensation with the Belarusian

Government. Progress on compensation would allow us to send Ambassador Speckhard back to Minsk on a permanent basis.

So the bottom line is, we're going to deal with them on a de facto basis. I think there's not much left to cut off.

QUESTION: So it means the United States doesn't regard him as a president anymore?

MR. RUBIN: Right.

QUESTION: Starting today?

MR. RUBIN: Starting yesterday when the statement was issued.

---

*Press Statement by James P. Rubin, Spokesman, September 13, 1999*

**Belarus: Return of U.S. Ambassador**

The Department announces the return of the U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, Daniel Speckhard, to his post in Minsk. Ambassador Speckhard was recalled to Washington in June 1998 after he was evicted from his residence in violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and a bilateral U.S.-Belarus agreement on leasing the residence.

Ambassador Speckhard's return follows successful negotiations that resulted in new Belarusian assurances that commitments under the Vienna Convention will be upheld as well as a commitment to compensation to the United States for losses sustained as a result of Belarus' action. We made clear from the beginning that progress in these two areas was essential to allow us to send our ambassador back to Minsk on a permanent basis.

Ambassador Speckhard is returning at an important time when the OSCE is attempting to initiate a dialogue between the Belarusian government and opposition on the conduct of free and fair elections and the strengthening of democratic institutions in Belarus. He is returning during a difficult period in Belarus' history, marked by negative trends, which include a clampdown on dissent, on independent political organizations, and intimidation of opposition political leaders and the media, and the end of the term of office to which President Lukashenko was elected in 1994. Having Ambassador Speckhard back in Minsk will enable us more effectively to promote democracy and human rights, help those who support and work for the restoration of democratic rule, and promote other mutual interests that we have in Belarus.

---

*Press Statement by James B. Foley, Deputy Spokesman September 21, 1999*

**Belarus: Disappearance of Opposition Leader Victor Gonchar**

On the evening of September 16, Victor Gonchar, the Deputy Chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet and a leading opposition leader in Belarus, disappeared. Shortly before his disappearance, Mr. Gonchar telephoned his wife in Minsk to say he would be home soon. Mr. Gonchar did not return home, however, and his whereabouts remain unknown.

Mr. Gonchar is not the first prominent opponent of the Lukashenko regime to disappear. On April 8, former National Bank Governor Tamara Vinnikova disappeared. On May 7, opposition activist and former Interior Minister General Yuri Zakharenko disappeared in mysterious circumstances on his way home. The whereabouts and current condition of Ms. Vinnikova and General Zakharenko remain unknown.

The United States is greatly concerned about this pattern of disappearances of opponents to Lukashenko's continued rule in Belarus. We call upon the Government of Belarus to do everything in its power to locate Mr. Gonchar, Ms. Vinnkova and General Zakharenko as well as to ensure their safety.

---

## Eight Human Rights Groups Appeal to Gore on Belarus

*Following is the text of an appeal from eight international human rights groups, sent Vice President Gore on July 19, in conjunction with Russian Prime Minister Stepashin's visit to Washington on July 27.*

Dear Vice President Gore,

We are a group of human rights organizations concerned about President Alexander Lukashenko's defiance of the rule of law and wholesale crackdown on civic and opposition groups and the independent media in Belarus, recently illustrated by the jailing of dissenters, threats to journalists, and harsh restrictions on freedom of association.

President Lukashenko's abrogation of international human rights agreements and increasingly autocratic rule have been accompanied by greater integration with neighboring Russia. Russia is Belarus' largest trading partner, and is the transit country through which much of Russia's cargo is delivered on its way to the West. The two nations have extensive cultural and linguistic ties. Belarusians rely extensively on Russian-owned television and radio broadcasting to Belarus as an alternative news source. President Lukashenko travels frequently to Russian provincial cities in an effort to gain support from conservative neocommunist and extreme right-wing movements in Russia.

Accordingly, we believe it is vital for you to raise the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus in your forthcoming meeting with Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin on July 27, as a matter of concern both to the U.S. and Russia. We hope that you can urge Russian leaders to use their good offices to promote and protect human rights and the rule of law in Belarus. With extensive trade relations and discussion of the formation of a Belarusian-Russian Union, Russia now has ample opportunity to raise with Belarus the international community's grave concerns about the absence of fundamental rights and freedoms in Belarus, and to intervene on specific cases of concern.

Since 1996, when President Alexander Lukashenko extended his term in office, shut down the elected parliament (the 13th Supreme Soviet), and defied the rulings of the Constitutional Court regarding his unlawful amendments to the 1994 Constitution by a national referendum, he has moved steadily to erode the rule of law which Belarus had begun to re-establish after gaining its independence in 1991. Independent media, such as the popular station Radio 101.2, have been closed, and independent newspapers such as *Naviny*, *Imya*, and *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* have been harassed. Numerous peaceful marchers and picketers have been jailed for short periods; academic freedom has been sharply curtailed; lawyers who obtained licenses to practice law privately have been outlawed by decree; workers who have engaged in free trade union activity have been persecuted. Members of the subsequently disbanded parliament who signed an impeachment appeal, including Vladimir Koudinov and Andrei Klimov, have been imprisoned on charges widely perceived as fabricated, or have been beaten, detained, or fined.

With the executive branch's control over the free flow of information and public discussion, social and economic rights have been severely impacted, notably issues regarding public health in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster; the metro stampede in May 1999 in which 57 people, mainly teenagers, were killed; the AIDs virus; domestic violence; and other women's issues. Even non-political forms of civic activity, for

example addressing the needs of disabled children or working women, have been harshly discouraged as local officials refuse to allow groups of citizens to hold public meetings, or to advertise their gatherings, particularly in provincial areas.

International and domestic human rights groups have brought attention to a number of cases emblematic of the deterioration of the rule of law in Belarus:

• In May, when the opposition decided to conduct alternative presidential elections to call attention to their claim that President Lukashenko's term in office was to expire on July 20, 1999, authorities detained organizers and arrested one of two leading candidates, Mikhail Chigir, on trumped-up charges of embezzlement. The other candidate, Zyanon Paznyak, a political asylee in the U.S., did not return to Belarus due to concerns about his safety. The charges against Chigir have been widely discounted by Chigir's lawers, human rights groups, the OSCE Chair in Office, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We urge his immediate and unconditional release.

• On May 7, Gen. Yuri Zakharenko, the former Minister of Internal Affairs, dismissed in 1996 after publicly opposing President Lukashenko, failed to return home after telephoning his wife to say he would be arriving shortly. Zakharenko was active in Chigir's presidential campaign, and had been under surveillance by the authorities. High-level officials have informed both human rights organizations and Western governments that they do not know Zakharenko's whereabouts, and fear he has become the victim of foul play. Periodically rumors are circulated that Gen. Zakharenko is in hiding, or was killed by the mafia over a bad debt, and yet the Belarusian government has failed to open up a prosecutor's criminal investigation into his disappearance or provide any evidence for the claims of mafia involvement. We urge the government to begin such an investigation immediately and to publicize its findings.

• Vera Stremkovskaya, a trial attorney who has taken up the defense of prominent persons who have fallen out of favor with the Lukashenko administration, such as collective farm chair Valery Starovoitov, has suffered harassment herself, through specious libel charges related to the practice of her profession. She has been frequently intimidated with threats that she will be disbarred, as three others lawyers who defended civil rights cases have been since 1996. Other attorneys who defend the numerous cases of demonstrators, independent newspaper editors, and other rights activists, have been forced to work silently and cautiously on behalf of their clients, in order not to add to their troubles. We urge that all harassment of Stremkovskaya and other attorneys cease immediately.

• Freedom of Association.

Recently human rights observers as well as administrators of development programs in Belarus have become particularly concerned with the President's decree of January 26, 1999, requiring all civic organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political parties, and trade unions, to re-register or face criminalization under the civil and criminal codes. The decree violates domestic and international law.

Although under international standards, freedom of association does not require a procedure for local registration (as distinct from tax-exemption), President Lukashenko's decree criminalizes any group which decides not to register. By instituting a system of discretionary registration, through a state commission under the Ministry of Justice, the decree does not implement freedom of association, but rather overregulates it by making registration contingent on the political arbitrariness of the state. And while many groups have registered under the decree, in some cases they have been compelled to change their leadership, the nature of their activities, or their names, and in some instances have been urged to swear loyalty to the 1996 version of the Constitution. In a further move to curb freedom of assembly and prevent competition during parliamentary elections scheduled in 2000, the National Assembly, the legislature appointed by President Lukashenko, passed amendments to the Law on Associations on June 30 banning the use of the words "Belarusian" or "popular" or "national" in the names of civic groups. The Council of Ministers is now proposing laws to jail non-registered activists.

Although the deadline was extended, and some groups rejected have been permitted to re-apply, we are concerned that by the end of the year, certain outspoken human rights, minority, or political opposition groups could be intimidated or outlawed. Currently, for example, on the eve of its annual congress, the largest political opposition movement, the Belarusian Popular Front, has been informed that it must remove the word "popular" from its name to be registered, despite its numerous chapters and activists in many cities. Polish community groups and Belarusian language associations have also been informed that they may not be registered. We call for the registration of civic groups under law consistent with international standards.

The U.S. government must send a clear signal to Russian leaders that tolerance of a mounting human rights crisis in Belarus, its close neighbor, is ultimately a threat to the level of democracy and human rights which Russia itself has achieved, and a threat to the human rights and security of the entire post-Soviet region of countries in transition, in which the U.S. has a vested interest.

Sincerely,

/Signed/ Maureen Greenwood, Advocacy Director for Europe and the Middle East, Amnesty International USA Chrystyna Lapychak, Europe Program Coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists Holly Cartner, Executive Director, Europe and Central Asia Division, Human Rights Watch Aaron Rhodes, Executive Director, International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, Executive Director, International League for Human Rights Felice Gaer, Executive Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights Jeff Prescott, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights Holly Burkhalter, Physicians for Human Rights

## Human Rights Watch Appeal to Lukashenka on Disappearance of Oppositionists

*Following is the text of an appeal from the New York-based Human Rights Watch urging Lukashenka to use all available means to locate and ensure safety of the opposisionists that have "disappeared" this year under suspisious circumstances.*

---

September 20, 1999 President Aleksandr Lukashenka Presidential Administration ul. Karla Marksa, 38 Minsk 220016 Belarus By fax: (375) (17) 222 3872

Dear President Lukashenka,

On behalf of Human Rights Watch I extend my greetings. I write to express my extreme alarm at the disappearance of Victor Gonchar and Anatoly Krasovsky. On September 16, Gonchar, vice-speaker of the Thirteenth Supreme Soviet and Krasovsky, head of the "Krasika" publishing house traveled to a local sauna and were due to return home later that evening. They did not return. Gonchar's wife, Zinaida, reportedly contacted city law enforcement agencies, local hospitals and morgues without result. Gonchar had been due to address a sitting of the Thirteenth Supreme Soviet on September 19

regarding the composition of the opposition delegation to OSCE-mediated talks, and to meet with the U.S. ambassador to Belarus on September 20.

As you may well recall, on March 1, police violently assaulted and arrested Gonchar on charges of holding an illegal meeting in a private cafe, for which he served ten days in detention. Prior to his release, Gonchar was charged with "abuse of office" under article 190 of the criminal code, a case which had yet to be brought to trial.

The disappearance of Gonchar and Krasovsky is but the latest in a series of "disappearances" of prominent opponents of your government this year. On April 8, Tamara Vinnikova disappeared; she is the former chair of the national bank, arrested in January 1997 on embezzlement charges. That Vinnikova was held under house arrest, guarded at all times by live-in KGB agents, her telephone calls and visitors strictly screened, strongly suggests that her disappearance was orchestrated by the authorities. On May 7, Yuri Zakharenka, former interior minister and an opposition activist, was last seen being bundled into a car by a group of unidentified men. His wife later told reporters that for two weeks prior to his abduction, Zakharenka had complained of being tailed by two cars. Zakharenka had issued an appeal in early 1999 to law enforcement agencies not to obey orders from the president after July 20 (the end of the presidential mandate under the 1994 constitution) and had also been in the process of forming the Belarusian Union of Officers, a potentially powerful and influential body. On May 16, Oleg Volchek, head of an independent commission on Zakharenka's disappearance stated that the latter was "probably kidnaped," while comments attributed to you blamed his disappearance on debts to "the mafia."

We are extremely concerned that comments attributed to senior government officials may betray official indifference to the disappearances of Gonchar and Krasovsky. In an interview with the Interfax newsagency, Ivan Pashkevich, deputy head of the presidential administration, reportedly stated that "Gonchar disappeared just like Yury Zakharenka. He disappeared just to attract public attention to the next session of the Thirteenth Supreme Soviet."

Human Rights Watch urges you to use all available means at your disposal to locate Victor Gonchar, Anatoly Krasovsky, Tamara Vinnikova, and Yury Zakharenka and to ensure the safety and security of all those living in Belarus, regardless of their political affiliations.

I await your response, which may be faxed at (1) (212) 736 1300.

Sincerely,

/s/ Holly Cartner Executive Director Europe and Central Asia Division Human Rights Watch

---

*Source: Web site http://www.hrw.org*

## European Union Worries about Hanchar's Disappearance

*Following is the full text of the statement by the EU presidency, issued September 23, 1999.*

**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the disappearance of Mr. Viktor Gonchar, Deputy Chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet of Belarus**

The European Union is deeply worried by the disappearance of Mr. Victor Gonchar, Deputy chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet of Belarus, on the evening of 16 September. Referring to the assurances given during discussions held in Minsk between the representatives of the EU and Belarusian authorities, the European Union calls upon the Belarusian authorities to do everything in their power to locate Mr. Gonchar's whereabouts and ensure his safety. The EU expects the results of these investigations to bring early results. The EU also reminds them of the fact that the previous disappearances of Ms. Tamara Vinnikova, former Central Bank chairwoman, and General Yuri Zakharenko, former interior minister, are still unclarified.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, and the EFTA countries members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.

# *THOUGHTS and OBSERVATIONS*

## The Belarusian Divide

*By Paul Goble*

Washington, July 21 (NCA) - Russia and the West have again parted company, this time over the legitimacy of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's continuing in office after July 20, the end of his term as set by his country's constitution.

Moscow has accepted Lukashenka's argument that a 1996 referendum there legally extended his term until 2001. But Belarusian democratic activists, Western governments and European institutions all have condemned that vote as flawed and viewed its use as illegitimate.

This division is likely to have serious consequences not only for Belarus and its relations with both East and West but also for Western assessments of possible efforts by other post-Soviet leaders - including Russia's Boris Yeltsin - to bypass constitutional arrangements.

And to the extent that happens, this Belarusian divide could ultimately cast a far larger shadow on East-West relations than even the differences between the two on how to respond to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic and Serbian behavior in Kosovo.

Yesterday (Tuesday) marked the end of Lukashenka's term of office as established by the Belarusian constitution, but Lukashenka and his supporters at home and abroad argue that his time in office was legally extended to 2001 by a referendum his government staged three years ago.

Lukashenka himself said on Tuesday that "we will continue to be legitimate for a long time." And the Belarusian leader said that he would respond to any protests against his rule with "the most rigorous and adequate but legal measures."

The Russian government echoed his words: Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin said that "there are no reasons to doubt" the legitimacy of Lukashenka's remaining in office.

But that hardline position put both Minsk and Moscow at odds with both Belarusian democrats and Western governments and human rights organizations.

Belarusian poet Vladimir Neklyayev spoke for many of his country's democratic activists when he said this week that "as of July 21, there is a legal basis to say that Belarus is run by the dictatorship of an illegal president."

And he called on "the community of democratic states, including Russia" to protest what he called Lukashenka's "dictatorial tendencies in Belarus."

While Moscow has responded by defending its ally Lukashenka, Western governments and human rights organizations have answered such appeals by taking public positions unprecedented in the post-Cold War environment.

Earlier this week, seven leading international human rights groups - including Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Human Rights Watch - called on U.S. Vice President Gore to press Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin on the issue of Belarus during their meeting in Washington next week.

Arguing that the human rights situation in Belarus is "deteriorating," the group said that this should be a matter of vital concern for both the United States and Russia.

Its members suggested that the U.S. "must send a clear signal" that any Russian tolerance of such abuses "is ultimately a threat to the level of democracy and human rights" not only in Russia but across the entire post-Soviet region.

And the groups both collectively and individually called on Lukashenka to avoid any repetition of his past repression of democratic protests.

In more diplomatic language, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe echoed these concerns. Its chairman, Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebaek, said Tuesday that repression in Belarus "must come to an end" and that future elections must be "free and fair."

So too did the European Union. In a statement released in Helsinki, it reaffirmed its support for the establishment of "a free, open and democratic society" in Belarus. And it suggested that only new and free elections there would make that possible.

But perhaps the toughest position on Lukashenka came from the U.S. State Department. In a statement released on Tuesday by spokesman James Rubin, Washington made it clear that it views Lukashenka's continuing in office as illegitimate.

Asserting that Lukashenka's "legal term of office" ended on July 20 and that the 1996 vote extending his term was based on "a flawed and unconstitutional referendum," the State Department said that his legitimacy "can only be restored by free and fair elections."

Even more, the department said that the Belarusian parliament that Lukashenka has sought to suppress remains "the sole legitimate" legislature of that country and that its right "to take its case to the Belarusian people" must be respected.

And the State Department said, Lukashenka's government must respect human rights and enter into a dialogue with the opposition "without preconditions" if Belarus and its people are "to return to the path of democracy."

Such positions put the West at odds not only with Minsk but with Moscow as well. And thus they are likely to affect East-West relations, even if they have little impact on Lukashenka, a man who routinely has ignored not only democratic principles but the concerns of others as well. ●

*Paul Goble is Communications Director, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Inc. We appreciate his permission to reprint this article.*

## Popular Front faces split over leadership

The congress of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) on 31 July-1 August failed to elect a leader for the next two years. The delegates will reconvene this fall to tackle the issue of leadership once again.

Zyanon Paznyak, the charismatic BNF leader who was granted political asylum in the U.S. and has headed the BNF from abroad since then, was supported by 156 votes and opposed by an equal number of delegates. Vintsuk Vyachorka, one of the BNF's six deputy chairmen, was supported by 152 votes and opposed by 160. BNF Acting Chairman Lyavon Barshcheuski told the congress that no leader was elected because none of the candidates won a majority of votes required for the election. The next day, Paznyak told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service the ambiguous wording "majority of votes" in the BNF election regulations means that he won the ballot because he received more votes than Vyachorka. Therefore, he concluded, he is the legally elected BNF chairman. However, no one from the BNF has rushed to support that interpretation.

Most Belarusian commentators tend to agree that the "scoreless draw" actually means Paznyak's defeat. And while no BNF body or activist has made any statement on the issue, many commentators believe that the BNF has actually split into two factions: one



*Zianon Paźniak (Paznyak)*



*Vincuk Viačorka (Vyachorka)*

supporting Paznyak and the other Vyachorka. A formal split, according to such speculation, will take place in the near future or at the reconvened congress at the latest. The following are responses to that split: Commentator Alyaksandr Fyaduta in *"Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta"*: "Paznyak's defeat was reflected primarily in the fact that he has not been able to propose a specific and realistic action program. Moreover, by making public a future BNF Board list without the names of Khadyka, Vyachorka, Byalatski, Siuchyk, and Ivashkevich [ed.: all opponents of Paznyak], he has split the BNF with his own hands. ...He has actually placed himself in opposition to the intellectual elite of the BNF."

Commentator Yury Drakakhrust in *"Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta"*: "The split has already taken place; differences between the rival groups are so significant that their leaders are not even sorry for their 'divorce.' Zyanon Paznyak openly announced on the eve of the congress that those who disagree with him should go. ...Now the struggle is focusing only on [who will inherit] the BNF 'trademark' and organizational structures. ...In this regard, the scoreless result of the congress means Zyanon Paznyak's indisputable defeat."

Stanislau Shushkevich, chairman of the Social Democratic Party and former chairman of the Supreme Soviet: "The movement is facing a split, Zyanon Paznyak has actually stopped being the BNF chairman. Still, I am shocked that they did not have enough sense...to come to a face-saving decision. They could make Vyachorka the BNF leader and Paznyak a honorary chairman, who from abroad would send his recommendations regarding the organization's activities." Stanislau Bahdankevich, chairman of the United Civic Party and a former National Bank head: "I suspect that they have drawn a division line between the orthodox nationalists and that part of the BNF that realizes that once they lack

sufficient support from the electorate, they need to look for a broad coalition to win future elections."

The split over the leadership of the BNF suggests two differing visions for the movement's future activities. Vyachorka is seen as a political technocrat who is open to dialogue with other opposition parties and the Lukashenka regime. "We should win in real elections, not in virtual reality," he told the congress, referring to the shadow presidential elections held by the opposition in May. During the congress, Vyachorka proposed to broaden the social base of the BNF by developing close cooperation with Belarusian NGOs, independent trade unions, and human rights organizations.

Paznyak, meanwhile, appears to be more of a prophet who is primarily concerned about the ideological purity of his followers. His comment during the May shadow elections that his rival, former Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir, is a fake oppositionist sponsored by Moscow caused embarrassment and indignation among many BNF activists. Shortly after, Paznyak's deputy, Yury Khadyka, publicly apologized to Chyhir.

In a message read at the congress, Paznyak proposed that the BNF launch two campaigns: one for electing a Civic Parliament (a kind of "virtual" legislature in Belarus), another for collecting signatures in support of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's dismissal. His opponents argued that there is no need for yet another opposition legislature--one that would be in addition to the already existing Supreme Soviet. They also stressed that the BNF should focus its efforts on the parliamentary elections next year. With regard to this effort, which will require negotiations with the ruling regime, Paznyak remained silent.

---

*SOURCE: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, Vol. 1, No. 11, 10 August 1999*



## Political Conflicts in Miensk

**By David R. Marples**

On 4 September I flew to the Republic of Belarus at the behest of the OSCE, and specifically its Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Miensk headed by the German diplomat, Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck. I was invited as an "expert" on Belarus, to take part in a seminar of the National Executive Committee (NEC)to help resolve the political impasse in the country.

The AMG was established to help resolve a constitutional crisis and to facilitate a dialogue between President Lukashenka and the parliament of the 13th session that was abruptly dissolved by the president in November 1996, and replaced with a truncated version of 120 deputies. In this same period, the president held a doctored referendum in Belarus to amend the 1994 Constitution, increase his own powers, and to extend his own 5-year period in office from the date of the referendum rather than the date of the presidential election (20 July 1994). Thus for the opposition, 20 July 1999 represented the end of the president's mandate, after which he was no longer be recognized as a legitimate ruler by foreign powers. On this date, according to the original Constitution, power passed to the chairman of the parliament of the 13th session, Syamon Sharetsky. But, fearing for his safety, and after taking temporary shelter in the OSCE offices, Sharetsky had promptly fled to Lithuania where he remains today.

Since he has been in Miensk, Ambassador Wieck has come under fire from different directions. Journalist Mikhail Podoliak, writing in Narodnaya Volya (19 August), claimed that Wieck had become a "middleman" for the presidency, with the implication that the ambassador was assisting the government to redeem itself. From Vilnius, Sharetsky maintained that he had been pressured by Wieck to take part in talks with the presidency and that sometimes this pressure was in violation of international principles. The ambassador has strenuously denied both charges. The International League for Human Rights, in its special issue of 1 September 1999, has stressed that before any meaningful dialogue can take place, political prisoners must be released and the opposition be permitted free and equal access to the media. Many leading oppositionists have questioned the sincerity and commitment of the government in the talks. For some, the talks have appeared to give legitimacy to a regime that has none.

The political psychologist, Uladzimir Padhol, provided a different analysis. He pointed out that the real fear was as follows: if the plans of the OSCE leaders are realized, and in Belarus a democratically elected parliament is restored, then this parliament may ratify the agreement about the union of Russia and Belarus, which will then be signed by President Boris Yeltsin of Russia and the illegitimate president of Belarus. A new parliament will, in his view, provide more supporters than opponents of the Union because of the constant portrayals in the (state controlled) media of the opposition as the enemies of the people. Thus a democratic election, in this instance, cannot provide a meaningful result because of the months of state propaganda through the media vilifying the opposition and its views. In this way, the results of a well intentioned OSCE program may be the loss of independence and the beginning of what Padhol terms a "new imperialism" on Belarusian lands.

In this chaotic situation, the role of the AMG has been difficult, to say the least. But Ambassador Wieck is a persistent man, and under his supervision, a dialogue has duly begun between the government and the opposition. One of the premises was the relative success of similar round table discussions in neighboring Poland. Our conference was an attempt by the National Executive Committee (led by the chairman of the parliament of the 12th session, Myacheslau Hryb) to come up with a guiding formula for democratic change. Simultaneously, the government and the opposition were each to appoint six members for the official discussions -- this seemingly straightforward proposition was complicated by the fact that eight political parties were vying for the six places. Both meetings centered on the parliamentary elections scheduled for the year 2000 as the best means to resolve the crisis. Both were held in the relatively plush BIB Belarusian-German joint venture hotel in west Miensk, which was considered the closest to a neutral venue.

Upon arrival in Miensk, I was whisked through the airport, bypassing customs and passport control and into a waiting OSCE minivan. On Belarusian TV that night I heard a government spokesperson droning on that the OSCE represented the "European opposition" in Miensk -- the implication being that NATO is the real authority in Europe. But then, I reflected, the government has to convince the public that there are reasons for its participation in the dialogue.

I had meetings with the OSCE mission leaders, including Ambassador Wieck, a lively man of 72, and with the German ambassador to Belarus, Horst Winkelmann, at the German Embassy. It was immediately obvious that there are different approaches to dealing with the Lukashenka government. Winkelmann pointed out that the role of ambassadors is to find means of communication. Cases like the Drazdy affair of the summer of

1998, in his view, represented a failure on the part of the western missions to reach a compromise. Had he been in Miensk at the time, he emphasized, the "walk out" of the Western ambassadors would not have occurred.

In addition, according to the German ambassador, he has to deal with the government in power, even though in theory his country recognizes that Lukashenka no longer has a mandate. He noted that the activist Viktar Hanchar is clearly seeking power himself, even though he has never subjected himself to an election and has been revealed (over results of the May 1999 opposition presidential elections) to be "a liar." He commented also that one should not regard the members of the two new assemblies as exclusively pro-Lukashenka. His experience had shown that in the House of Representatives there are many people of independent views who are not government "puppets." We concurred on the point that Lukashenka missed a golden opportunity by not holding new presidential elections upon the expiry of his term. Had these occurred, the president would certainly have emerged victorious, thus resolving the constitutional crisis, though not the problems related to human rights and democratic development.

I met Ambassador Winkelmann also at his stately home in the suburbs, along with the BPF strategist, Padhol. It was a contrast in styles: Winkelmann, sedate and dignified, firm in his view that the role of ambassadors is to resolve problems rather than take offence: "If you ignore the wasps," he told me as I fought over a piece of ham with three insects, "they will go away"; Padhol, with a dome of a head, gulping drafts of red wine and relating the current political intrigues (the "latest" was Shushkevich's decision to give an interview to Radio Liberty in which he accused Ambassador Wieck of "bankrolling" Mr. Hryb).

The night before the seminar, I was a guest at a formal dinner between the AMG and the NEC, at which, along with others, I was able to put questions to Mr. Hryb and company. It began tentatively. I felt very "Western," sitting to the left of Wieck, the voice of reason. Hryb (whose name means "mushroom" in Belarusian) was the most moderate of the hosts, who included newspaper editors, economists, and politicians, including the former chairman of the National Bank, Stanislau Bahdankevich and three members of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party. Most of them wanted first and foremost to remove the president from office; anything less seemed immaterial.

The following day, I was one of eight people (and one of two foreigners; the other being a civil servant from France, who was an expert on "vertical systems of government") to present a report to the seminar *"Belarus: Options for Choice"* chaired by Hryb. Most of the reports concentrated on the economy and the lack of change since 1991 in Belarus. The reports were as follows. The first speaker was Leonid Zlotnikov, a member of the political council of the United Civic Party, who spoke on *"Catch-up development: a strategy for Belarus."* He was followed by Ivan Nikitchenko, a highly reputable scientist and agricultural expert, whose talk was entitled *"The principal conceptual provisions for the restoration of the economy in the Republic of Belarus"*; and by Yury Shevtsov, a lecturer at the European Humanitarian University, who presented a paper on *"Belarus: A Slow Drift Toward Europe."*

The fourth speaker was Yuri Drakokhrust, a well-known reporter from the newspaper *Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, who provided statistics on the views of Belarusians toward several critical political issues. Next was Yaroslav Romanchuk, executive director of the *Belorusskaya Gazeta* newspaper, who focused on the *"Geopolitical Choice of Belarus."*

My talk was the sixth. Its focus was *"Belarus: History and Politics in the Post-Soviet Period"* making the case that an independent Belarus was not an anachronism at the end of the 20th century in Europe. It was followed by that of Aleksey Korol, editor of the newspaper Politika, the organ of the BSDP, on *"Adapting to Europe, Part 1."* Dennis Perrin of Paris, France, gave the final report before lunch, on "Local Administration in France." The last report was by Leonid Loiko, a member of the BSDP, and a follow-up to Mr. Korol's paper, *"Adapting to Europe, Part 2."*

Several people took part in the seminar but did not present reports. They included Valery Kharbalevich, political observer of the newspaper Svobodnye novosty and a member of the United Civic Party; Syarhey Levshunau from the analytical center "Strategia" and a member of the National Executive Committee; Uladzimir Matskevich, a political scientist, Alyaksandr Sosnau, a member of the political council of the United Civic Party, Alyaksandr Potupa, President of the Center for the Research of the Future, Padhol, and Christopher Panico from the AMG.

There were plenty of questions after my own report. During the coffee break there were more. It was never far from my mind that these delegates were debating their own future, whereas I was following a professional calling, free to catch the next plane to Frankfurt whenever I chose. Most of the talks provided a consensus on certain issues: Belarus, the speakers held, must embark on economic reforms, particularly in agriculture, an area of near disaster. Second, all speakers agreed that Belarus must reorient its foreign policy toward Europe and either away from Russia or concurrently with agreements with Russia. Third, the delegates all agreed that the preservation of an independent state was critical. Given Padhol's warnings, I also considered that this was the critical issue and that otherwise the conference and government-opposition talks would be meaningless.

Later a dapper fellow took the seat (and microphone) next to mine. He was Raul de Luzenberger, the head of the TACIS office (European Union) in Miensk. To my surprise he informed the delegates that really their economy was not so bad. Belarus had no major debts like Russia or Ukraine, thus it was quite feasible to embark on reforms. Clearly then, from this perspective, Belarus has benefitted by standing still, ignoring calls for privatization and reestablishing state control over the economy. On the other hand, the man from TACIS was more likely trying to inject a note of optimism amid the general gloom.

As the conference drew to a close, some delegates (including Padhol) left in haste to attend a demonstration in the town center, held by the Popular Front to commemorate the Battle of Orsha (8 September 1514), when the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland, allegedly with the willing participation of Belarusians, defeated the Russian army. This seemed to me an admirable myth (most Belarusians were conscripted into this army and the victory was qualified, in that the real goal had been to capture Smolensk), the sort of thing that might convince some locals that the country really has nearly half a millennium of national aspirations. One delegate, the editor of an opposition newspaper (there are at least six that operate in some fashion), told me that the republic reached its national fruition in the late 19th century -- a point that I also found difficult to accept when today's Belarus was merely a western province of the Russian Empire.

The atmosphere in Miensk was highly charged, the politicking and debates intense. On the Saturday before I left there was a major crisis: all supplies of vodka had disappeared from the stores. Was it a government plot? Russian Premier Vladimir Putin arrived in Miensk

during this same time and appeared to scotch any idea that the Russia-Belarus Union could be finalized in the immediate future. Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma rescinded a "preliminary invitation" to President Lukashenka to attend a summit in Yalta on 10-11 September of fourteen countries from the Baltic and Black Sea regions, evidently because of the general lack of acceptance of Lukashenka's legitimacy as president of Belarus. The BPF held a Soym in Miensk, led by Vyachorka, which rejected both Paznyak's claim that the meeting was illegal and that the BPF should be divided into a political party and informal association. It was a poignant reminder not only of the divisions among the opposition, but also the growing rift within the major opposition political party.

Of all the analyses I heard in the past week, I liked that of Winkelmann the best. "You know," he told me, "in the final analysis the people in villages don't give a hoot about all this. They think politics is a game that the former nomenklatura in Miensk plays to fill its time. I doubt if they even know the names of the political parties. All they care about is bread on their tables." Yet if politics is a game there are still rules to which to adhere. And it seems to me t ashenka has broken most of them. ●

---

*David Marples is a professor of history and acting director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta.*

---

## Lukashenka Prefers Monologue

*The following article appeared in the September 28, 1999, issue of the RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, Vol. 1, No. 18.)*

The OSCE-mediated talks between the authorities and the opposition in Belarus seem to be nearing an end even without having really begun. That, at least, is the perception of commentators in Belarus's independent press, based on President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's 16 September meeting with the leaders of power ministries and law enforcement bodies and subsequent developments.

At that meeting, Lukashenka took advantage of the public anxiety that followed the blasts in Moscow and Volgodonsk, in southern Russia, by ordering his subordinates to take tough security measures to prevent terrorist attacks in Belarus. According to Lukashenka, Belarus faced a threat not from elements in Russia but from domestic "extremists" and "nationalists" who intend "to destabilize" the situation in Belarus.

In particular, Lukashenka ordered the border guards and customs officers to monitor the border so that "a mouse could not creep through it." He demanded that the authorities of Minsk and other cities identify venues where "all kinds of oppositionists and other scum" can hold demonstrations; protests in all other locations were to be banned.

Lukashenka demanded that within the next three days, the state controlled media inform the public both at home and abroad where "Belarusian nationalists" find money "to destabilize" the situation in Belarus. And he also ordered his administration to close down those newspapers that "assail state officials" without good reason, pointing to an allegedly libelous article about State Security Secretary Viktar Sheyman in the opposition newspaper *"Naviny."*

The disappearance of opposition politician Viktar Hanchar several hours after the 16 September meeting is seen as an ominous indication of how the situation may develop in Belarus as a result of Lukashenka's instructions. As deputy chairman of the opposition Supreme Soviet and organizer of the alternative presidential elections in May, Hanchar fell into the category of domestic "extremists." The opposition regard Hanchar's disappearance as a kidnapping organized by the authorities to intimidate political opponents of the current regime. Hanchar was to have presided over a Supreme Soviet session on 19 September at which the opposition delegation to the talks with the authorities was to have been approved.

Shortly after Hanchar's disappearance, law officers seized property belonging to *"Naviny"* and the author of the allegedly defamatory article about Sheyman, without waiting for a court order. Sheyman duly filed suit against *"Naviny,"* demanding exorbitant damages (under Belarusian economic conditions) totaling 15 billion Belarusian rubles ($52,000). Two days later, a Minsk court ruled in Sheyman's favor. *"Naviny"*, which turns a monthly profit of some $2,700, now faces closure.

Western ambassadors to Minsk who expressed their concern over Hanchar's disappearance met with Lukashenka's response that they should look for Hanchar in the West before alluding to any sinister goings-on in Belarus. Echoing a high-ranking official in the presidential administration, official media said Hanchar staged his disappearance in order to gain more publicity. But as protests have increased around the globe, Minsk has launched an investigation into both Hanchar's disappearance and that of former Interior Minister Yury Zakharanka in May.

The latest developments in Belarus highlight some unanswered questions about Lukashenka's regime and the attitude of Western democracies toward it.

First, was Lukashenka's declaration to enter into a dialogue with the opposition really sincere? Or was he perhaps acting on a political calculation — as some Belarusian commentators suggest — to "simulate" negotiations in order to gain legitimacy for himself and his government in the West? "I have few illusions that we will be able to conduct talks with Lukashenka. He prefers to give endless monologues," Stanislau Bahdankevich, head of the opposition United Civic Party, noted in mid-August. Judging from developments since then, Bahdankevich was right.

Second, has the OSCE--the proponent of political dialogue in Belarus--any leverage to make that dialogue happen? The answer again appears to be "no." Lukashenka's regime has not created any conditions for a "favorable political climate," as requested by the Belarusian opposition ahead of the OSCE-mediated talks. Those conditions included access to the state-run media for the opposition and the release of former Premier Mikhail Chyhir and other political prisoners. In fact, the political climate in Belarus has become even more oppressive than was the case before the preparations for the dialogue began.

Third, what should be done by the West to promote democracy in Belarus, which is overtly defying Western political and moral values? Belarus offers embarrassing and puzzling proof of a regime in Europe that suppresses political opponents and tramples on human rights while enjoying a substantial measure of popular support and remaining virtually unpunished in the international arena.

In this context, any Western response to Lukashenka's latest challenge will reflect not only the measure of his credibility in the international arena. It will also attest to the West's commitment to promoting democracy where it is so sadly lacking and so desperately needed.

---

## BELARUS' FORUM

### WHY LUKASHENKA HAS TO GO

*By Dr. Mikhail Pastukhov*

Dear Countrymen! Citizens of the Republic of Belarus!

Five years ago, in 1994, we elected the first president of the Republic of Belarus. It was for the first time in the national history that we held direct and democratic elections of the state ruler. The two-round voting gave office to Alexander Lukashenko, former boss of "Garadzets" collective farm in the Mogilev region, who took an oath to serve Belarusian people, to act within the Constitution of Belarus and respect the national symbols -- "Pagonia" coat of arms and white-red-white flag. No matter how one likes activities of Lukashenko as of president of Belarus, it is clear and indisputable that during five-year ruling he has numerously violated his Oath, the Constitution and national laws. His anti-national, incompetent domestic and foreign policies split the society in two, brought the country to international isolation, completely ruined its economy, culture and morality, caused ethnic annihilation of the indigenous people.

In autumn 1996, Lukashenko, backed by Russian chauvinistic circles and most reactionary country-based forces, committed an anti-constitutional upheaval and turned a dictator. Since then, he has openly betrayed Belarusian people by offering state sovereignty in exchange for Kremlin's loyalty to himself. For five years Alexander Lukashenko has been resolving his own problems at the cost the state: he stuffed the secret presidential foundation with money, got a grip of other people's property, traveled a good deal, enjoyed life, underwent best medical treatment, provided his sons with brilliant education, helped his friends and acquaintances find good jobs in the government, played hockey, football and tennis, avenged his political opponents, provided fund-raising for festivals and films. The only thing he has forgotten -- to make the Belarusian nation prosperous, safe and happy, which was his Constitutional responsibility.

Now these five troublesome years come to an end. The 20th of July is the last day of Alexander Lukashenko's legitimate ruling. Citizens of the Republic of Belarus should elect a new leader: competent, well educated, respectful, honest, modern and strong. We need a patriot of his homeland, an individual who can keep his word. The society is looking forward to elect president of Belarus anew. Therefore, on the 20th of July we shall ask Alexander Lukashenko to remove from his office and hand the power over to the legitimate 13th Supreme Soviet, which will ensure that the new state ruler is elected.

Why the president has to go after July 20, 1999?

1. Constitution ofthe Republic of Belarus 1994 (Art. 97) establishes a five-year term of office for president of the Republic of Belarus, starting from the moment he takes up office. According to the Constitution, this term can be extended under no circumstances. President A .Lukashenko pledged an oath of allegiance to the 1994 Constitution and took office on July 20, 1994. Thus, his term expires on July 20, 1999.

2. As a result of the 1996 national referendum, a newly-amended Constitution (actually a new constitution) was put into effect in contradiction to the established constitutional norms. The new version changed the principles for organization and functioning of the chief state institutions and virtually institutionalized absolute power of the president. Among numerous amendments to the Constitution was one stipulating the automatic extension of the president's term. Under Art. 144 of the newly-amended Constitution, the presidential term commences from the moment the new Constitution itself comes into force, that is, November 27, 1996. It needs mention that the referendum itself contained no question about the extension of the president's term as such, nor was the thing a matter of discussion by the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus (the Parliament).

3. Given the unlawful and enforced adoption of Constitution's new edition, the 1996 Constitution cannot be regarded as a legal basis for the state system and government. Its actual implementation by official bodies cannot overrule the 1994 constitutional provisions, including those, which define the term of office for the president.

4. Currently, President Alexander Lukashenko has taken over legislative, executive and judicial authority, including control over the Constitutional Court and the Central Electoral Commission, thus becoming the only agent of authority in the Republic of Belarus. Nevertheless, the only lawful body that has the right to schedule presidential elections is the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus, which was unlawfully disbanded following the November 1996 referendum. The Supreme Soviet may pass a decision on the date to hold presidential elections if it is convened with the power to legislate.

5. Under the present circumstances, the entire responsibility for scheduling and holding presidential elections rests with President Alexander Lukashenko himself. If open, democratic presidential elections are not held within the period established under the 1994 Constitution, then after July 20, 1999, President Alexander Lukashenko loses his legitimacy. ●

---

*Mikhail Pastukhov, Doctor of Law and Professor, is a former member of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus*

---

*Source: Charter '97, July 16, 1999*

---

### "Youth will yet have its say"

Excerpts from an interview with the editor-in-chief of the Belarusian independent newspaper "*Imia*", **Iryna Chalip (Khalip).**

---

*Translated from the Belarusian by George Stankevich*

We met Iryna Chalip two days after her arrival in Chicago.

— **What was the purpose of your trip to the U.S?**

— I came to attend a 3-week seminar organized by the United States Information Agency. The seminar was entitled "Print Journalism in the United States". Its purpose was to familiarize participants with the work practices and methods of American newspapers. The seminar's organizers invited the chief editors of the handful of independent Belarusian newspapers in existence today. Among them were Uładzimir Bajan ("*Viciebski Kurjer*"), Mikałaj Alaksandraŭ ("*Brescki Kurjer*", a quite interesting newspaper, one of the few making a profit), the editors of two newspapers from Mahiloŭ — Hienadź Sudnik ("*Tydzień Mahiloŭski*") and Maryna Ircho, editor of a new paper appearing three times a week, and also editors of two independent newspapers from our smaller cities — Viktar Vaładaščuk ("*Słonimskaja Hazeta*") and Anatol Bukas ("*Barysaŭskija Naviny*").

Before coming to Chicago, we spent a week in Washington, D.C. We had interesting meetings and discussions in the International Association of Journalists, the Association of Newspaper Editors, the State Department and the National Security Council. We had the opportunity to meet with presidential adviser, Carlos Pasquale. There was a great curiosity about us, and we found ourselves answering many questions about life today in Belarus.

From a professional point of view, however, our American colleagues often found it difficult to understand us; it was though we were speaking two different languages. This is because we are working under vastly different conditions and dimensions. The American democracy is over 200 years old; ours is starting from zero. Our American colleagues, for example, could neither answer nor understand our question concerning the grounds on which a newspaper might be banned in America.

**— Did you have a chance to express your views, to describe in detail today's situation in Belarus ?**

— Of course we did; we also had the opportunity to answer many questions on a variety of topics. Everyone we met was acutely interested about events in Belarus. Clearly, both the State Department and the National Security Council understand who president Łukašenka really is and what he represents. During these meetings,we were even asked what, in our view, should be the future US. policy in relation to Belarus.

**— And how did you reply to that ?**

— First of all, it should be based on principles and be very consequent — much as it has been, in fact, beginning with the U.S. refusal to recognize the 1996 referendum in Belarus. The departure of the US ambassador was also a correct step. After the initial scandal surrounding diplomatic residences in Drazdy had subsided, envoys of many countries chose to return and found alternative housing in Belarus, ignoring the fact that the Belarus government reneged on paying them promised compensation. The U.S ambassador, on the other hand, has remained resolute and not returned — and that is right (*Ed. Note*: Daniel Speckhard returned to Belarus on Sept. 14) . In my opinion, the United States has to adopt an even tougher position of condemnation toward this regime, now that president Łukašenka's legitimate term of office has expired. The United States is the only country that can put him in his place; for Łukašenka respects only a position of strength.. One cannot reach an agreement with him, one can only give him an order. So far nobody has really spoken to him from such a position.

**— So who is Łukašenka: a communist, a fascist, or simply a high-handed dictator ?**

— In my opinion, the present Belarusian regime possesses the features of German fascism, Soviet totalitarianism, and, some aspects of Latin-American dictatorships. People such as Vinnikava and Zacharanka (*Ed. Note*: and now Hančar) are vanishing without a trace. These kinds of vanishings had heretofore occurred only in Latin-American countries. The attitude of the population to any regime may differ. In some cases people get used to a harsh regime, as long as it follows a tradition. Then the people don't oppose it. However, the Belarusians are not at all prepared for it. They are peaceful, sincere, soft, good-neighborly and patient. Their mentality is not at all suited to dictatorship. This is why they are suffering so. On the other hand, blame might also very well be placed with the people; after all, they agreed and voted for this regime — although it is also true that they did not anticipate the true nature of Mr. Łukašenka. Such a cave-man type of dictatorship in Belarus contradicts our historical traditions and the nation itself.

**— And Europe is right next door ...**

— Very much so. Warsaw is nearer than Moscow; it takes one and a half hours by car from Miensk to Vilnia. In Poland and Lithuania, democratic reforms resulted in considerable economic successes and improvement in the overall mood of the people.

**— But what will the future bring ? How much longer can Łukašenka's government survive ? According to many observers, even now he has the support of the majority of the population. He himself asserted this repeatedly on the eve of July 20 , the day his legitimate term in office expired (according to the 1994 constitution).**

— No, this is not so. The majority no longer supports him. In Miensk, he is almost unanimously hated. If an election were held now, for example, in Miensk, he would be roundly defeated, getting at best maybe 2% of the vote. He still enjoys the support of that segment of the population that is known in Russia as the "Red Belt". Belarus has its own version of a "Red Belt." For the most part, Łukašenka's support comes from the provinces, where there is little intelligentsia, and local authority of the Soviet type is far stronger. Many depend on it and simply fear it. All chairmen of the local executive committees are appointed personally by the president.

**— And doesn't the reduction of living standards have an effect on people's political awareness ?**

— It most certainly does. However, the Belarusian people are uniqely patient and it is difficult to overcome their inherent inertia. People stand in a line for hours to purchase eggs, and still say: "Things are not that bad. Look at Russia, where hungry miners don't get paid paid for months and sit on railroad tracks. Here, on the other hand ... " What level of suffering these people have to reach before they open their eyes is difficult to guess. One of Łukašenka's opponents, as a matter of fact, the leader of our Communist party, Siarhiej Kalakin, pithily observed: "His main enemy is economics. He will not defeat this enemy."

**— What is the people's attitude toward the idea of uniting with Russia ?**

— This "revolutionary Red Belt" expects that, as soon as a unification document is signed, the people will start getting paid on time in valuable Russian rubles. They don't understand that Russia will not invest in an unpredictable country with an unpredictable leadership. The case of East Germany, where West Germany is now investing huge sums of money despite its own internal problems, won't be repeated. In my opinion, it is only a game of unification that is being played, where all players know full well what they want. Łukašenka understands that unification will cease discussion about his legitimacy. He is valiantly striving to occupy some important post on the Russian stage, knowing that he won't be Belarusian president forever. Yeltsin also understands that he won't be re-elected in Russia. He doesn't want to retire, so the Union represents a new form of statehood in which he might occupy some honorable post.

**— Do you perceive in this game that pressure is being exerted on Belarus by a "Russian superpower" attitude, which has weakened during the period of Russian democratization ?**

— I believe this attitude never really disappeared; it was always there. Unfortunately, many groups — both right and left wing — espouse it. Imperial ambitions represent a normal phenomenon in Russia. Observe the sudden surge in patriotism among "Demrussians" and "Yablokists" at the start of conflict in Yugoslavia. We heard cries of "Hey, Slavs!" and "We have to help our younger brothers!" and appeals to realize Russia's great mission, and so on.

**— And what is new in the republic's cultural life? — Or is it an oxymoron ?**

— Belarusian cultural activists are sitting as still as mice. Occasionally they are forced to sign appeals of the type "Thank you, dear comrade president". They do so humbly lest they be fired and feel nobody needs them. Moreover, the overall atmosphere in the country makes it impossible to create, to perceive events in the arts, or to relax in a theater or at a concert. For example, some artists design rich people's summer homes, while others like the famous composer Edward Chanok write songs like "Comrade President".

**— Can the political opposition change anything in Belarus today? What is your prognosis?**

— Unfortunately, the Belarusian opposition is very weak today. Somehow it cannot transform itself into a real force, a single party

or union. Opposition leaders are constantly quarreling about who among them is more important: the Belarusian Popular Front, for example, or the United Civic Party. This impedes any meaningful common action. Today, thousands of people join street demonstrations and protest actions without thinking about party allegiance.

— However, the voice of Belarusian youth is becoming increasingly louder. Many nationally and socially-minded young people are making their voices heard. These are the voices of a new generation — one more patriotic than its predecessor. These young men and women know the Belarusian language well; they love Belarusian history and culture. They actively participate in protest actions and support the opposition. They are being dismissed from schools and institutions but remain fearless and outspoken. Students are commonly considered the barometer of a revolution. This is a youth that grew up in a post-totalitarian era. It lacks many of the complexes of that terrible time. The future belongs to these young people.

— Most likely nothing will happen before 2001. There will be delays, dialogues and all kinds of negotiations... And then, through the new elections, I am sure that the youth will deliver its decisive word. Although, knowing the nature of our president, one can expect anything. He may annul any election results and declare himself president-for-life. Even this turn of events cannot be excluded. If that proves to be the case, it will certainly be time for the international community to intervene more decisively in Belarus' internal affairs.

**— Iryna, please tell us about your very recent personal experiences .**

— My newspaper recently published an article on the arrest of one of Belarus' businessmen. The article mentioned that the attorney general never signed an order for this arrest. .... Literally two days before my departure for the States, our offices, my car and my apartment were searched. The search party consisted of six plainclothesmen and a handcuff-jangling militiaman. They confiscated computers, diskettes, audiocassettes, documents and recordings. I called our office today and was told that all my colleagues were interrogated. I am presently being considered only a witness, and for that reason was probably allowed to leave for the United States.

**— How does your father feel ?**

— He does not work due to frequent severe headaches. He underwent a full medical examination and was told that his situation will not improve, the changes are irreparable. You can understand, if a person his age is being clubbed over the head ...

**— ... I wish you further success, courage and steadfastness to face whatever awaits you in our homeland.**

— Thank you ! ●

*The interview was conducted by Vankarem Nikifarovič.*

## Belarusian Government's View on Talks with Opposition

*Following is the (as-received) text of a September 7, 1999 press release by the Embassy of Belarus in Washington, DC.*

### On the Dialogue Between the Government and the Opposition in Belarus

On September 2, 1999, Mr. M. Sazonov, Adviser to the President of the Republic of Belarus and Head of the Working Group for consultations with political parties and nongovernmental organizations, held a meeting with the heads and representatives of foreign missions accredited to Belarus. Ambassador H.-G. Wieck, Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus also took part in the meeting.

In his speech Mr. M. Sazonov emphasized that the main goal of the Working Group was to create conditions for the free and fair elections in Belarus in 2000.

Commenting upon the results of the 1996 referendum, which created a block of problems, the Head of the Working Group stressed that both at the time of the referendum and today President Alexander Lukashenko is widely supported by the population which is confirmed by public opinion polls.

Mr. M. Sazonov expressed gratitude for the understanding and acknowledgement of this fact by the international community which constitutes the starting point for the dialogue to be started with the mediation of the OSCE.

While acknowledging the fairness of the statements by European community that some democratic institutions in Belarus are not developed enough, he noted the readiness of Belarus to improve the situation and underlined the fact that Belarusian society is passing today through the initial stage of its democratic development.

As a cornerstone and most important factor which makes these processes possible he cited stability, absence of interethnic conflicts, terrorism and military confrontation.

The Belarusian government accepted a proposal by the OSCE and other European international organizations to begin a dialogue with public associations and political parties, first of all with the opposition ones, because they have their own approaches towards the problem of improving the Belarusian election system. The President's side, through the agency of the OSCE and its Advisory and Monitoring Group, is ready to discuss: 1) improvement of the election legislation; 2) access of opposition parties to the electronic mass media both during negotiations on election legislation and on a wider scale; 3) parliament's functions. The government sees the above agenda for consultations or negotiations suggested by the OSCE to be acceptable and adequate to the aim set forth - to hold democratic elections.

It was stressed that the government considers the dialogue to be positively possible and hopes for an effective work and constructive atmosphere around the future negotiations.

Mr. M. Sazonov focused separately on the access of the opposition representatives to the electronic mass media. Attention of the participants was drawn to the fact that TV time had already been provided to the opposition even though there were no official contacts between the participants in the negotiations.

Also speaking at the meeting, Mr. H.-G. Wieck, Head of the OSCE AMG in Belarus, said that if an agreement on the agenda's three items is achieved during the forthcoming negotiations and the negotiations' results are approved by both sides it will open up a new page in democratization of Belarus. He recognized the governments of 53 OSCE member-states and the Parliamentary Assembly for their support of the negotiations' concept. He noted that the AMG plans to hold a meeting of the opposition delegation with members of the diplomatic corps.

According to H.-G. Wieck, the forthcoming talks will become an important step in improving Belarus' relations with the OSCE member-states.

Representatives of France, Poland, Germany expressed their support of the dialogue and interest in its positive results. Robert LeCock, Charge d'Affaires of the USA in Belarus, said that the United States fully supports the dialogue process and the OSCE role in it. He also said that the US will try to exert all its influence to stimulate the dialogue.

# BELARUSIANS ABROAD

## Ambassador Wieck's Role in Launching Dialogue

*Catherine Fitzpatrick, executive director of the New York-based International League for Human Rights, in the League's Special Issue of* BELARUS UPDATE (August 1999), *addressed the question of a controversy in Miensk about the strained relationship between the opposition, OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group head Hans-Georg Wieck, and the independent and opposition press. The controversy was sparked by an article titled "The President's Middleman: Hans-Georg Wieck's Second Job," published in the August 19, 1999 issue of* Narodnaya Volya, *an independent Belarusian newspaper. According to Fitzpatrick, the article "made some serious charges regarding alleged pressure placed on the opposition to go along with OSCE's game plan for talks with the government, and has even implied that threats were made." Fitzpatrick, however, admitted that "initial checking has determined that a number of claims in [the article] are false."*

*On August 27, Fitzpatrick interviewed the speaker of the 13th Supreme Soviet, Semyon Sharetski. The interview follows.*

**FITZPATRICK:** When you came to the OSCE mission in July, you had already been warned by your colleagues of the imminent threat of arrest. Did Amb. Wieck warn you about the threatened arrest, known to him from his own sources?

**SHARETSKI:** No, he did not warn me, but he did everything possible so that this arrest would not take place. My sources were reliable.

**F:** Did the OSCE AMG offer you safe haven, at least temporarily? (Understandably, the OSCE could not offer asylum, since this is the prerogative of a state.)

**S:** Yes, he offered to me to make use of the protection of OSCE and to stay until July 21st, that is, until the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus.

**F:** Did Amb. Wieck warn you, or threaten you in any way in July in Minsk, or in the later meeting in Vilnius, that the Lithuanian authorities would deport you if you declared a government in exile or if you released a decree about the transfer of authority?

**S:** Amb. Wieck and I had no conversation regarding the attitude of the Lithuanian authorities towards me, but Amb. Wieck did say that if an opposition government would be created, other countries would not recognize it.

**F:** Was there any pressure on the part of Amb. Wieck, the Lithuanian authorities, or any other party, to get you to back down from the position of the opposition, that the 13th Supreme Soviet must be the instrument through which talks would be organized with the regime?

**S:** I am very grateful to the government of the Lithuanian Republic for the fact that I can come here to a democratic, free country. I have been given everything necessary for survival and for my work as chair of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus. There has been no pressure on the part of the Lithuanian authorities; on the contrary, I am finding sympathy and the opportunity for support at all levels. There was no such pressure on the part of Amb. Wieck. There was a conversation with him, and as I understood it, Amb. Wieck welcomes the fact that all the parties who are in opposition to the regime have agreed to transfer all authorities for the talks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic.

**F:** Mr. Sharetski, do you believe that there should be some conditions that must be fulfilled by the government of Belarus before the opposition, the 13th Supreme Soviet, would sit down to a round table, for example, the release of political prisoners, the cessation of persecution, and so on?



*Siamion Šarecki (Sharetski)*

**S:** Not only do I believe this, the opposition, in particular the Supreme Soviet, demands this. Moreover, we demand as a requirement that there be access to the mass media. Otherwise, the essence of the talks could be distorted and they will not be of any use. Furthermore, as already happened in 1997, Lukashenko could accuse both the opposition and the OSCE that it was supposedly their fault that the talks broke down. All of this has already happened, although in reality, in 1997, it was Lukashenko who stopped the talks, and broke them off in the most crude and blatant manner.

**F:** I am asking these question because I understand that pressure will be placed on the opposition to drop any sorts of conditions, including basic principles of human rights, and regardless of what the opposition's position will be, our organization, and other NGOs, will continue to advocate that a gesture of good faith must be made by the Lukashenko government in the form of human rights progress, so that the talks are substantive. We have checked some of the allegations made in the Podolyak article and found them to be false, for example, at the meetings between Amb. Wieck and you, no threats were made about deportation from Lithuania.

**S:** It is true that he is always pushing the opposition into talks, and at times, even in violation of international principles, and of course neither I, as chair of the Supreme Soviet, nor the Supreme Soviet itself, nor the opposition as a whole, will accept that. ●

---

*Belarus Update is a regular news bulletin of the Belarus Human Rights Support Project of the International League for Human Rights. The League, now in its 58th year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations and International Labor Organization (ILO).*

*The Belarus project is a part of Human Rights Defenders' Project, originally launched in 1982 to defend individuals and groups who suffer reprisals for promoting human rights in their societies. The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their cases before the U.S. government and public and international fora and intergovernmental organizations regarding President Alexander Lukashenko's wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.*

*For information, e-mail belarus@ilhr.org or call (212) 684-1221 or fax (212) 684-1696 or visit the Website at http://www.ilhr.org.*

## Two Exiled Belarusian Leaders Assess Situation in Their Homeland

*Following are excerpts from an interview with two Belarusian opposition leaders, Siamion Šarecki and Zianon Paźniak, conducted by the weekly Niva, as reported in the RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report No. 15 under the title "Exiled Oppositionists Hosted by Fellow Belarusians in Poland".*

---

The 29 August *"Niva"*--a weekly of the Belarusian minority in Poland--featured interviews with Belarusian Supreme Soviet Chairman Syamyon Sharetski and Belarusian Popular Front Chairman Zyanon Paznyak. On 13 August, the two exiled Belarusian oppositionists met with *"Niva"* chief editor Witalis Lubaand senior editor Aleksander Maksymiuk at the weekly's editorial office in Bialystok (Podlasie Province). Following are excerpts from that meeting:

**SHARETSKI:** "[Russian politicians], too, have begun to realize who Lukashenka is, but they cannot abandon him because he is a kind of gift for them; the man who rules Belarus does not wantBelarus to exist, he wants to unite [Belarus] with Russia. It is hard to find such a marvel anywhere else. Furthermore, Russian trains pass through Belarus, Russian gas is pumped across Belarus into Europe, but Belarus obtains nothing from that.Russians are used to moving [in Belarus] almost as freely as in their gardens while looking for a carrot. For instance, [Belarusian] Foreign Minister [Ural Latypau] is a colonel of [Russia's] Federal Security Service, Interior Minister [Yury Sivakou] is a Russian general (he says he is Belarusian, but he was born and brought up in Russia, maybe his father was a Belarusian some time ago), the [Belarusian] KGB first deputy chairman is also a Russian general. And the main thing is that the deputy prime minister in charge of Belarusian culture and science [Uladzimir Zamyatalin] is a colonel of the Russian army; besides, he is a political provocateur by education (he has such an education--he is a professional provocateur) (ed.: Zamyatalin graduated from the V. I. Lenin Military Political Academy in 1983). Everything that is Belarusian is being destroyed, but from day to day the Belarusians are becoming more and more aware of their nationhood. ...

"I am often asked why there are no 100,000-strong demonstrations in Belarus. The answer is simple: the most active Belarusians--scientists, writers, undertakers--either lie atKurapaty [ed.: mass burial ground near Minsk of victims of the Stalinist terror] or have left Belarus. Twelve thousand left [Belarus] last year alone. And the ordinary people are intimidated. ...

"The main point is that Russia upholds Lukashenka not only politically but also economically. That's why he is able to stay in power, that's why he can maintain 135,000 police troops in the 10-million-strong nation, that's why he is able to pay regular pensions, even if small. But these pensions are really negligible. My 90-year-old mother (to quote the example mostfamiliar to me), who worked all her life, gets [each month] 5.4 million rubles [$19.3 according to the official exchange rate and $11 according to the street one]. And 1 kilogram of sausage costs 2.5 million rubles. I get 3 million rubles because Lukashenka has forbidden indexation to be applied to my pension. ...Our family cannot afford to eat sausages. ...

"I came to Lithuania as the Supreme Soviet chairman, who has assumed the duties of acting president because such is the constitutional requirement. There will be appropriate steps. I have agreed upon them with Supreme Soviet deputies. We must somehow persuade international organizations that it is impossible to re-educate the dictator, to make a democrat of him. The OSCE leadership believes that it is possible to mollify him to some extent, sit at a negotiation table, and agree on democratic elections. As far as I know history, this has never happened. A dictator will never allow himself to be re-educated. But my opinion is one thing, while that of the OSCE (there are 54 countries in it) is another. The U.S. has taken a more or less decent stand, while some European countries think that it is possible to exert some influence on Lukashenka, that he will agree to hold democratic parliamentary elections. I ask--why parliamentary and not presidential? It was the president's powers that expired, not the parliament's. If you are so clever, let us organize democratic presidential elections."

**PAZNIAK:** "Everything that Mr. Sharetski said is obviously true. I agree with him regarding both his assessment of the situation and that of the OSCE's role. I, as a politician unencumbered by any [official] post, can speak more freely on this topic. I think that the OSCE represented by [OSCE Minsk mission head Hans Georg] Wieck, unfortunately, has not always been impartial. The OSCE partly reflects Germany's eastern policy position. It's bad when an official in an international organization lobbies German policies through [non-German] channels. It is absolutely evident that certain political circles, which are being lobbied by Wieck, want to come to an agreement with the Lukashenka regime at the expense of the [Belarusian] opposition.

"The very cautious preparation of the so-called negotiations suggest [an agreement will be reached] on holding parliamentary elections under conditions close to those proposed by Lukashenka in order to secure some official recognition for his regime, to present his regime in the West as democratized, as one accepted by the opposition. Such is the conformist stand of the OSCE in Minsk, it is the second year now that I have seen [such a stand] taken. I am not the only one with such an opinion, many politicians are critical of the OSCE's activities. ...

"The West, which actually sustains Russia, has great leverage in Russia's politics. I say: If the West issues credits that are indispensable for Russia's existence, it should make them conditional on the termination of [Russia's] policy of "integration" and of making advances to the dictator Lukashenka." ●

---



---

## The President of BNR Rada Shares Her Views with BR

**BELARUSIAN REVIEW** has on many occasions published material about the historic Belarusian National Republic (BNR) -- also known as the Belarusian Democratic Republic -- and its government in exile, the BNR Rada or BNR Council. Mrs. Ivonka Survilla, who resides in Canada, is the current president of the Rada. She was elected to this post by Rada members on August 30, 1997.

**BELARUSIAN REVIEW:** *When you became president of the Rada, we published your appeals on behalf of the BNR. Can you tell our readers about the current Rada and its objectives?*

**IVONKA SURVILLA:** The Rada's objectives have not changed since 1918; they remain as they were formulated in its three Constituent Charters. Forced into exile by Russian Bolshevik troops, the Rada has since then been educating the world about the plight of the Belarusian people under Soviet oppression and has been using every available means to promote democracy and independence in Belarus. Today, the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic does everything in its power to liberate Belarus from Łukašenka's dictatorial regime. As you know, former President Łukašenka has been working towards the "integration of Belarus with Russia," hoping that such an integration



*From left to right: Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič, Ivonka Survilla, Radzim Harecki, Siamion Šarecki*

would allow him to run for the presidency of a unified Russian-Belarusian state. We consider such a union a threat not only to the very existence of Belarus as an independent state, but detrimental to the safety of Europe and the rest of the world. This position was outlined by the Rada in its MEMORANDUM of October 15, 1998.

**BR:** *Under the 1994 Constitution, considered legal by most Western countries, Łukašenka's term as president expired on July 20. What is your view about the current constitutional crisis in Belarus?*

**IS:** Under the 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, (which is still the only valid Fundamental Law recognized by the international community), Łukašenka's presidential term expired on July 20. Mr. Siamion Šarecki, the chairman of the 13th Supreme Council (Soviet) of the Republic of Belarus, became the acting president of Belarus until such time as presidential elections are held and a new president is sworn in. I have recently visited Lithuania to express our support to Mr. Šarecki. Mr. Šarecki has clearly indicated that he is against any kind of union of Belarus with Russia, and has asked the international community to make any kind of assistance to Russia conditional upon Russia's respect of Belarusian independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

**BR:** *How would you assess the Russian role in Belarusian politics?*

**IS:** Without Russia's intervention, Łukašenka would have been impeached in 1996 for his violation of the constitution, and Belarus would now be a European democracy, assisted by the international community and working towards the well-being of its people. Instead, Belarus is a dictatorship with its economy on the brink of collapse. Since July 20, it has been governed by a usurper. And yet, this usurper gets all the help he needs from Russia. On a recent visit to Miensk to chair a meeting of the Belarus-Russian Union Executive Committee, Russian Premier Vladimir Putin stated that "regardless of any domestic problems in Russia and regardless of who heads the government, Russia's policy toward Belarus remains unchanged."

**BR:** *We understand you had been invited by Mr. Šarecki to meet with him in Vilnius. What happened in Vilnius?*

**IS:** I have accepted Mr. Šarecki's invitation to meet with him in Vilnius in the framework of the Rada's policy to support Belarusian politicians whose goals coincide with those of the Rada. On August 27, while in Vilnius, in the presence of Mr. Šarecki and members of the Lithuanian parliament and some 30 media representatives, I signed an appeal to the people of Belarus, the Belarusian diaspora and the governments and parliaments of the world community, asking for their support for the legitimate acting president of Belarus. The other signatories of the appeal were Mr. Stanisłaŭ Šuškievič, the first head of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Miačysłaŭ Hryb, the chairman of the Supreme Council and signatory of the 1994 Constitution of Belarus, and Mr. Radzim Harecki, president of the World Association of Belarusians "Baćkaŭščyna" (Fatherland).

**BR:** *What was your message to the people of Belarus, the Belarusian diaspora and Western powers?*

**IS:** Allow me to quote here the appeal of August 27, 1999:

"On July 20, 1999, Aleksandr Łukašenka's term as president of the Republic of Belarus expired and all governmental structures established by him became illegitimate. On this date, under Article 105 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the chairman of the Supreme Council, Siamion Šarecki, became the acting president of the Republic of Belarus until such time as a new president is sworn in, while Viktar Hančar, first deputy chairman of the Supreme Council, took upon himself the duties of the chairman of the Supreme Council. In the near future, a new government will be sworn in and according to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, presidential elections will be called. "However, through anti-constitutional methods, Aleksandr Łukašenka and the regime he has created have remained in power. Moreover, they continue their efforts to unite Belarus and Russia into one state, of which Mr. Łukašenka hopes to become president. Regretfully, they are supported by many Russian politicians who wish, like Łukašenka, to reestablish the empire. "We appeal to the people of Belarus and to all Belarusians of the world to support the establishment of a constitutional government in Belarus and an independent, democratic, lawful Belarusian state. We appeal to the parliaments and the governments of all democracies to refuse to recognize the usurper and the anti-constitutional structures he has set up, and to support the aspirations of the people of Belarus to remain independent and determine their fate through a democratically elected government." ●

## NEWS BRIEFS

**LUKASHENKA MIGHT RUN FOR BELARUSIAN-RUSSIAN PRESIDENCY** -In an interview with Russian Public Television on 30 June, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said he is prepared to cede most of his powers to the Belarus-Russia union president if that office is created. He added that he might run for the union presidency. "If there is a union and its president is elected by the people, why shouldn't I run against Boris Yeltsin for the position?" he said. Lukashenka confirmed that the next presidential elections in Belarus will be held in 2001. He rejected the opposition's claim that his presidency will be illegitimate after 20 July. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 1, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE IMPOSES RESTRICTIONS ON NGOS' NAMES.** -The Chamber of Representatives on 30 June adopted amendments to the legislation regulating the activities of political parties, trade unions, and public organizations in Belarus, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The legislators banned the use of the words "popular" and "national" as well as "Belarus" and "Republic of Belarus" in the names of Belarusian NGOs. Other amendments established the minimum number of members required for registering an organization: 1,000 for political parties, 500 for trade unions. Under the new legislation, people acting on behalf of an unregistered organization will be fined up to 50 minimum wages and detained for 15 days if they repeat that offense. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 1, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OFFICIALS DISAPPOINTED WITH UNION TREATY DRAFT** - On 1 July in Minsk, Belarusian and Russian legislators discussed a union treaty draft prepared by expert commissions from both countries. According to RFE/RL's Belarusian Service, the Belarusian side was disappointed with the document. Mikhail Sazonau, Belarusian presidential aide, said Belarus urged Russia to introduce a union presidency and supranational bodies with extensive powers, but Russia declined the proposal. Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Valyantsin Vyalichka commented that the draft treaty stipulates the creation of a "union of two states, not a single union state." The Minsk forum also discussed holding referendums on the unification of the two countries. According to Russian lawmakers, such a referendum could be held in Russia no sooner than March 2000. Belarusian Central Electoral Commission head Lidziya Yarmoshina declared that Belarus is ready to hold a unification referendum at any time. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 2, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA THREATENS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH WEST** -In a speech at the 2 July session of the Belarusian-Russian Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka announced that he will seek closer relations with the West if Russia continues to drag out the implementation of a planned merger between the two states. "We have made a big mistake.... We have been leaning toward the East for too long," Lukashenka told the assembly. He added that he has instructed the Foreign Ministry "to establish the kindest and closest relations" with the West. Some Belarusian and Russian commentators say that Lukashenka's statement was aimed at pushing Moscow into closer integration. Moscow has not agreed to Lukashenka's proposal to establish a common presidency and supranational bodies with extensive powers in the Belarusian-Russian Union. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 7, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA SAYS HE IS READY TO TALK WITH OPPOSITION** - Lukashenka said the same day that he is ready for a dialogue with the Belarusian opposition. He said the dialogue should be aimed at reaching "a broad social consensus on how to honestly and fairly hold [parliamentary and presidential] elections in 2000 and 2001." In response, former Supreme Soviet Speaker Stanislau Shushkevich said: "It is hard to believe in the sincerity of Alyaksandr Lukashenka who has driven the country into a dead end and pretends that he has realized that." The Belarusian opposition does not recognize the controversial 1996 constitution, which calls for presidential elections in 2001. According to the opposition, Lukashenka's presidential term expires on 20 July. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 7, 1999)

**BELARUS AGREES TO RUSSIAN RUBLE AS UNION CURRENCY** -Russian Premier Sergei Stepashin said at a session of the Executive Committee of the Russian-Belarusian Union in Moscow on 7 July that a union treaty between the two states could be signed this fall. Stepashin added that the two sides do not differ in principle on the structure or content of the treaty. "We are moving ever closer to becoming a unified state," Interfax quoted him as saying. Belarusian National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich said at the session that Belarus accepts Russia's proposal to introduce the Russian ruble as the single currency of the union. Stepashin instructed the central banks of Russia and Belarus to finalize a plan for the gradual introduction of the single currency and the establishment of a single emission center. The plan is expected to be implemented from 1999-2008. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 8, 1999)

**OSCE TO SEND SPECIAL MISSION TO BELARUS** - Adrian Severin, head of the OSCE working group for Belarus, announced at the 7 July OSCE parliamentary session in St. Petersburg that an OSCE special mission will visit Belarus from 15-17 July to help promote a dialogue between the opposition and the authorities, BelaPAN reported. Severin said one of the main tasks of the Belarusian authorities is to organize free and internationally recognized parliamentary elections in 2000. Severin asked Belarusian Council of the Republic Chairman Pavel Shypuk to persuade President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to enter into a dialogue with the opposition. Otherwise, he said, no progress will be achieved in the political standoff in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 8, 1999)

**U.S. DOUBTFUL ABOUT BELARUSIAN UNION VOTE** - U.S. State Department spokesman James Foley on 8 July said he would doubt the validity of any vote in Belarus on a union with Russia. "In the absence of the full restoration of democratic government in Belarus, it's hard to imagine that any popular approval process on [such a] union in Belarus would be truly democratic and representative of the will of the people," Reuters quoted him as saying. Foley said the U.S. supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. He added that their sovereignty contributes to the stability of the region. "At the same time we do not oppose integration as such among the new independent states as long as such integration reflects the voluntary will of the people expressed through a democratic process," Foley noted. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 9, 1999)

**ANOTHER BELARUSIAN OFFICIAL SEEKS ASYLUM ABROAD.**Lieutenant-Colonel Alyaksandr Datsiy, former chief editor of the Belarusian Interior Ministry's *"Na strazhe,"* has asked for political asylum in "one of the democratic countries of Europe." In a telephone conversation with RFE/RL, Datsiy said he was pressured by Belarusian special services to acknowledge that he illegally sponsored the opposition activities of former Interior Minister Yury Zakharanka, who disappeared in Minsk in early May under unexplained circumstances. Datsiy added that the authorities threatened to bring him to trial and sentence him for financial offenses unless he confessed to his ties with Zakharanka. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 12, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA SAYS BELARUS-RUSSIA UNION MUST HAVE PRESIDENT.** In an interview with "Die Woche" on 9 July,Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said the planned Belarus-Russia union must have the posts of president and vice president as well as a government.According to Lukashenka, as things currently stand, the union's presidency should be assumed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, while the Belarusian president should become the vice president. Lukashenka added that he will not agree to a different model for the distribution of power within the union. He said that Russian ruble may become the union's single currency if Russia shows its readiness to develop the union while"taking into account the proposals of the Belarusian side," Belapan reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 12, 1999)

**BELARUS NOT HURRYING TO ADOPT RUSSIAN RUBLE AS NATIONAL CURRENCY** - National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich said after meeting with Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 13 July that the president instructed him to take "immediate measures to strengthen the national currency as a basis for the unification of the currencies of Belarus and Russia." At the same time, Prakapovich noted that the adoption of a single currency is a complex process that is currently only at the "conceptual" stage. "For several more years we will be receiving our salaries, pensions, and allowances only in Belarusian rubles," Belarusian Television quoted him as saying. Former National Bank head Stanislau Bahdankevich told BelaPAN that the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus without economic reforms will immediately result in economic collapse, mass bankruptcies, and soaring unemployment. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 14, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION TO MARK LUKASHENKA'S FIVE YEARS WITH 'POPULAR FESTIVITIES'** - Opposition parties intend to celebrate the end of Lukashenka's five-year term in office by organizing public protest actions, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 13 July. The United Civic Party will stage "popular festivities" in Minsk and other cities on 20 July. The next day, the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) plans a "popular holiday" on a square near the presidential administration building in Minsk. "The crowd will simply ask President Lukashenka what he has done for Belarus during his five-year rule," BNF Secretar @slau Siuchyk told RFE/RL. The Belarusian opposition does not recognize the 1996 constitutional referendum, which extended Lukashenka's presidency to 2001. It is demanding that he step down on 20 July. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 14, 1999)

**OSCE PERSUADES BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT TO TALK TO OPPOSITION** - Following meetings with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and opposition parties, the OSCE special mission headed by Adrian Severin announced on 18 July that Lukashenka has agreed to hold free parliamentary elections in 2000 and enter a dialogue with the opposition. "The Belarusian president stated his commitment to the holding of free, fair, and recognizable parliamentary elections next year as well as his support for a national dialogue on elections between the government and the opposition," the OSCE mission said in a statement. Talks are expected to begin in early September. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 19, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ORDERS GOLD RESERVE DOUBLED BY 2001** - National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich said on 16 July that the president has instructed him to double the state reserves of gold and other precious metals within two years, BelaPAN reported. Prakapovich said there is no crisis in the Belarusian banking system, noting that the country's 27 banks increased their capital from 79.8 million euro ($81.4 million) to 190.7 million euro from January-June 1999. Lukashenka said the same day that it is "still not clear" whether Belarus will adopt the Russian ruble as its national currency. "One thing needs to be known: we will not give up the sovereignty and independence of our country [while forging a single currency with Russia]; we will accept [such a currency] only on a par," Belarusian Television quoted Lukashenka as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 19, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PARLIAMENT HEAD SEEKS REFUGE IN MINSK HOTEL** - Syamyon Sharetski, speaker of the opposition Supreme Soviet, has moved to the Minsk hotel at which the OSCE monitoring and consultative group's offices are located, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 19 July. Sharetski said that Belarusian special services have recently been watching his activities "very impudently" and, in his opinion, are going to arrest him. Sharetski is to preside over a 21 July Supreme Soviet session that will debate the end of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's five-year term on 20 July. According to the 1994 constitution, the Supreme Soviet chairman assumes the powers of the head of state if there is no legitimate president in the country. Sharetski told RFE/RL that he will stay in the OSCE Minsk office as long as "he deems it necessary." (RFE/RL Newsline, July 20, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES SUPPORT TO PRIVATE BUSINESS** - Lukashenka on 19 July told the first session of the newly created Council for the Development of Entrepreneurship that he will encourage and support the private production sector "in every possible way." He appealed to the council "to submit proposals intended to amend relations between the authorities and entrepreneurs" and pledged not to "obstruct" the work of private businessmen. Lukashenka also promised to grant Tatsyana Bykava, the chairwoman of the council, the powers of a cabinet member and allow her to participate in the cabinet's discussions on all economic problems, BelaPAN reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 20, 1999)

**EU SAYS BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT'S LEGITIMACY EXPIRED** - The French Embassy in Minsk has circulated a statement on behalf of the EU saying that 20 July was the last day of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's legitimate presidency. The statement stresses the need for free, democratic, and fair elections to restore the legitimacy of Belarus's political authority. It also urges all the concerned parties to begin a dialogue and expresses the hope that Lukashenka's agreement to a dialogue with the opposition will be backed by concrete proposals on holding democratic parliamentary elections in 2000. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 21,1999)

**U.S. ALSO QUESTIONS LUKASHENKA'S LEGITIMACY** - U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said on 20 July that the 1996 changes to the Belarusian Constitution, which gave Lukashenka the right to extend his term until 2001, were based on a "flawed and unconstitutional referendum." According to Rubin, these changes and the "arbitrary extension" of Lukashenka's term in office undermine the Belarusian president's democratic legitimacy. "Lukashenka's legitimacy as an elected representative of the Belarusian people can only be restored by free and fair democratic elections in which all political parties can participate on an equal basis," Rubin said. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 21,1999)

**RUSSIA REAFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR LUKASHENKA** - Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin said on 20 July that Russia has no reason to doubt Lukashenka's legitimacy. "The [1996] referendum returns are indicative--more than 70 percent of the population voted for prolonging the powers of the president who was elected for a five-year term in 1994," Rakhmanin said. He added that Russia intends to promote its relations with Belarus in compliance with the declaration on further integration signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Lukashenka last December (RFE/RL Newsline, July 21,1999)

**UKRAINE, POLAND PLEDGE NOT TO CHANGE POLICY TOWARD BELARUS** - Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk said on 20 July that Ukrainian-Belarusian relations will remain unchanged following the end of Lukashenka's five-year term in office. The same day, Polish Foreign Ministry spokesman Pawel Dobrowolski said Warsaw will continue its policy toward Belarus. "On the one hand, we criticize President Lukashenka's policy and violations of the law committed by him, but on the other--we will not break relations with Belarus. Now we will maintain them more on a social than political level," Dobrowolski said. He added that no visits of high-ranking officials are planned by the two countries. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 21,1999

**RIGHTS GROUPS URGE GORE TO DISCUSS BELARUS VIOLATIONS WITH RUSSIAN PREMIER** - In a rare instance of joint protest, eight human rights groups called on Vice President Al Gore to raise the subject of the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus during his meeting with Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin scheduled for July 27. The list of violations included President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's "defiance of the rule of law and wholesale crackdown on civic and opposition groups and the independent media," the jailing and harassment of dissenters, threats to journalists, and "harsh restrictions on freedom of association." The eight protesters are Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, the International League for Human Rights, the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the

Advancement of Human Rights, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and Physicians for Human Rights. They urged the U.S. to "send a clear signal to Russian leaders that tolerance of a mounting human rights crisis in Belarus, its close neighbor, is ultimately a threat to the level of democracy and human rights which Russia itself has achieved, and a threat to the human rights and security of the entire post-Soviet region of countries in transition, in which the U.S.has a vested interest." The last time rights groups joined forces in a single statement of protest was in October 1998, when seven organizations criticized Ambassador Richard Holbrooke for failing to address human rights issues in the Kosovo accord he negotiated with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. (REF/RL Watchlist, July 22, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA CURBS ACADEMIC FREEDOMS** - The Belarus government is stifling academic life in its "Soviet-style attack on civil society," Human Rights Watch (HRW) charged on July 15. A 49-page HRW report details how the Lukashenka regime has maintained a ban on campus political activity and suppressed research on controversial topics such as Belarusian nationalism during the Soviet era. History textbooks written in the post Soviet period have been removed from the classroom and replaced with Soviet-era editions. Students and lecturers are threatened with expulsion for off-campus political activities. "Lukashenka is strangling intellectual life," said Holly Cartner, director of HRW's Europe and Central Asia division. "This drive for political control on campuses mirrors what he has done to the rest of society." (REF/RL Watchlist, July 22, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATES ON 'FIRST DAY' AFTER LUKASHENKA** - More than 3,000 people took part in the opposition "folk festival" near the presidential office in Minsk on 21 July to mark the end of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's legitimate term in office. The demonstrators carried placards urging Lukashenka to step down and pronouncing 21 July "the first day without Lukashenka in power." Police troops, which were present in large numbers, did not intervene but arrested 53 people after the protest ended. The same day, the opposition Supreme Soviet convened to declare Lukashenka's tenure over. Viktar Hanchar, who was elected Supreme Soviet first deputy chairman, said Supreme Soviet chairman Syamyon Sharetski is now "de facto the head of state." Earlier the same day, artist Ales Pushkin dumped a wheelbarrow of manure with Lukashenka's portrait in front of the presidential office, saying his action is intended to thank the president "for five years of fruitful work." (RFE/RL Newsline, July 22, 1999)

**U.S. TO MAINTAIN TIES WITH LUKASHENKA ON 'DE FACTO BASIS'** - State Department spokesman James Rubin said on 21 July that the U.S. government will continue to deal with Lukashenka even though he lost his legitimacy after 20 July. "The fact that we'll continue to deal with him on a de facto basis, in our view, does not legitimize him," Rubin said. He added that unless the Lukashenka regime shows respect for human rights and democracy, the U.S.'s "policy of selective engagement will remain very much in effect." (RFE/RL Newsline, July 22, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT LAMBASTES TELEVISION FOR SHOWING PROTEST** - Speaking at a 22 July nationally televised conference on this year's harvest, Alyaksandr Lukashenka scolded Belarusian Television for showing the previous day's opposition rally protesting his remaining in power . "A harvester must be the main hero for the mass media. But they show those unhinged people loitering around Minsk streets, and 600 out of this 1,000-strong crowd are plainclothes policemen," AP quoted Lukashenka as saying. Meanwhile, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported that courts have begun trying those detained after anti-presidential rallies in Minsk and Hrodna on 21 July. According to the opposition, more than 70 people were detained in Minsk on 21 July. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 23, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER FLEES TO LITHUANIA** - Syamyon Sharetski, speaker of the opposition Supreme Soviet,fled to Lithuania last week, fearing for his safety after the end of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's legitimate term on 20 July. Sharetski's colleagues from the Supreme Soviet had said he should now be regarded as the legitimate head of state (see "RFE/RL's Newsline,"22 July 1999). Sharetski told the Vilnius-based *"Respublika"* on 26 July that he wants to avoid a confrontation with Lukashenka and "evaluate the current situation." Sharetski also called on Lukashenka to enter into talks with the opposition and honor the constitution. "We have only one plan -to eliminate...dictatorship and [restore] democracy - We do not want to go to Russia, if Lukashenka wants it, let him take his possessions and go," Reuters quoted Sharetski as telling *"Respublika."* (RFE/RL Newsline, July 26, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER HEAVILY FINED** - A Minsk court on 26 July ordered the independent newspaper *"Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta"* to pay 2.1 billion Belarusian rubles ($7,900) in compensation to Judge Nadzeya Chmara for the "moral damage" inflicted on her by its coverage of a trial over which Chmara had presided. According to the court, the newspaper had suggested that the verdict pronounced by Chmara was not written by her but by someone whose "political order" she was obeying. Valyantsin Zhdanko, deputy editor of *"Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta,"* said he is surprised by the unprecedented amount of compensation demanded by the court. "This is a new form of the Belarusian authorities' struggle against independent media--[the authorities] do not close but ruin them financially," Belapan quoted Zhdanko as saying. The newspaper is to appeal the verdict. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 27, 1999)

**KALININGRAD GOVERNOR IN BELARUS** - Kaliningrad Oblast Governor Leonid Gorbenko said in Minsk on 27 July that Russian regional leaders support the unification of Russia and Belarus, Belarusian Television reported.Gorbenko added that he fully shares the position of Lukashenka with regard to creating a union state and opposes "any transition stages and half-steps that delay the resolution of the issue." Lukashenka stressed he is interested in developing close ties with the Russian exclave, including the use of the Kaliningrad port for shipping Belarusian goods abroad. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 28, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CELEBRATES OLD INDEPENDENCE DAY** -Some 4,000 demonstrators marched through Minsk on 27 July to mark Belarus's old Independence Day. In 1996,President Alyaksandr Lukashenka moved the holiday from 27 July--the day on which Belarus declared its sovereignty in 1990--to 3 July, which marks the Soviet liberation of Belarus from German troops in World War II. The march was sanctioned by the authorities, but organizers changed its route and protesters clashed with the police some 500 meters from the presidential administration building. According to Belapan, police arrested several dozen people, including Mikalay Statkevich, leader of the opposition Social Democratic Party. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 28, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER MEETS WITH LITHUANIA'S LANDSBERGIS** - Supreme Soviet Chairman Syamyon Sharetski,who fled last week to Vilnius, met on 27 July with Lithuanian parliamentary speaker Vytautas Landsbergis. Sharetski informed Landsbergis about the situation in Belarus, stressing that Lukashenka's legitimate term has expired. According to BNS, Landsbergis praised the Belarusian opposition for its moderate tactics aimed at restoring

democracy in Belarus and later predicted that relations between Vilnius and Minsk will not suffer because of Sharetski's visit. "We act in a moderate,restrained way," ELTA quoted 'rgis as saying.Lithuanian Deputy Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas said that Lithuania, though recognizing the legitimacy of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet, must be guided in its relations with Lukashenka by a "pragmatic approach and the need to safeguard national interests through friendly economic and political relations," according to BNS. (RFE/RL Newsline, July 28, 1999)

**MINSK UNHAPPY ABOUT BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER'S STAYING IN VILNIUS** - At a meeting with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Algirdas Saudargas on 29 July, Belarusian Ambassador to Lithuania Uladzimir Harkun voiced Minsk's dissatisfaction with the "circumstances" surrounding Belarusian Supreme Soviet Chairman Syamyon Sharetski's stay in Vilnius, BNS reported. Saudargas assured Harkun that Lithuania wants to continue developing good-neighborly relations with Belarus. Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikalay Barysevich said the same day that Sharetski's stay in Vilnius is regarded by Minsk as a "private trip." (RFE/RL Newsline, July 30, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT HOLDS CONGRESS** - As widely expected, the congress of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) that took place in Minsk on 31 July-1 August turned into a battleground over the form of leadership to be pursued by the main opposition movement. One group supported BNF leader Zyanon Paznyak, who obtained political asylum in the U.S. in 1996 and has ruled the BNF from abroad since then. Another group, led by Paznyak's deputy, Vintsuk Vyachorka, argued that Paznyak's leadership is too authoritarian and demanded that more powers be given to members inside Belarus. Paznyak, who sent a message to the congress from Poland, called on the BNF to side only with those Belarusian opposition organizations that "in no way participate in Russian politics." (RFE/RL Newsline, August 2, 1999)

**FRONT FAILS TO ELECT LEADER.** - The congress proposed two candidates to lead the BNF, Paznyak and Vyachorka, but neither obtained the required majority of votes to become BNF chairman. On 1 August, 152 delegates voted for Vyachorka and 160 against him. Paznyak was supported by 152 votes and opposed by an equal number of delegates. The BNF is technically left leaderless, with Paznyak as acting chairman until the BNF reconvenes in the fall to tackle the issue of leadership once again. The congress did, however, adopt a declaration calling for the protection of Belarus's sovereignty and condemning Russian-Belarusian integration. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 2, 1999)

**RUSSIA TO REOPEN RADAR STATION IN BELARUS** - Visiting Colonel-General Vladimir Yakovlev, commander of the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces, said on 2 August that this year Russia will test a Soviet-built radar in Baranavichy, Belarus, and put it back into service in 2000, Interfax reported. According to Yakovlev, the Baranavichy facility is expected not only to substitute for the old radar station in Skrunda, Latvia, but also to make Russia's early warning system against missile attacks even more effective and reliable. He added that Russia will supply information on missile launches to Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 3, 1999)

**PAZNYAK SAYS HE WAS RE-ELECTED BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT HEAD** - Zyanon Paznyak, exiled leader of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 2 August that he was re-elected BNF chairman during the BNF congress in Minsk on 1 August. It was announced at the congress that the delegates did not elect a chairman since neither of the two candidates--Vintsuk Vyachorka and Zyanon Paznyak--gained a "majority of votes." Vyachorka was supported by 152 delegates and opposed by 160. Paznyak was supported by 156 votes, (not 152 votes, as incorrectly reported by "RFE/RL Newsline" on 2 August) and opposed by an equal number of delegates. Paznyak said that the wording "majority of votes" in the BNF election regulations is in his favor, since he won more votes than Vyachorka and therefore is the legally elected BNF chairman. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 3, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION TO CREATE CONSULTATIVE BODY FOR TALKS WITH AUTHORITIES** - Meeting in Minsk on 3 August, eight major Belarusian opposition parties and the Supreme Soviet decided to work out a joint stance for talks with the authorities under the aegis of the OSCE and to set up an opposition consultative council, BelaPAN reported. According to United Civic Party Chairman Stanislau Bahdankevich, those attending the meeting determined that Belarus's political opposition consists of the Supreme Soviet and the parties that have not recognized the results of the 1996 constitutional referendum. Bahdankevich added that the opposition is ready to enter a dialogue with the authorities, provided that it is given access to the state media. (RFE/RL

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT TO WATCH OVER VODKA, CIGARETTES** -Alyaksandr Lukashenka has signed a decree on strengthening state control over the production and sale of alcohol and tobacco, Belarusian Television reported on 3 August. The decree establishes that alcohol may be produced only by methods and in quantities that are approved by the state. Wholesale traders in alcohol and tobacco products must have licenses issued by the government "in coordination with the president." Belarusian Television commented that the 900 or so licenses issued so far to such traders is an "excessive" number. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 4, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES TO SEEK RE-ELECTION IN 2001** - Alyaksandr Lukashenka told Russian journalists in Minsk on 4 August that he will seek another five-year term in 2001, when his extended, seven-year tenure expires. "I will persuade people in a civilized way that I can represent their interests for another five years after 2001," AP quoted him as saying. Lukashenka denied that he is a dictator but admitted that there are "elements of authoritarian rule" in his regime. According to him, economic processes in Belarus, as a country in a "transition period," cannot be allowed to "drift along on their own." (RFE/RL Newsline, August 5, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA CHIDES RUSSIA FOR NOT HEEDING HIS ADVICE** - Lukashenka also castigated Russia's leadership for failing to heed his advice not to withdraw nuclear missiles from Belarus. He said he had warned Russian President Boris Yeltsin that NATO would immediately embrace former Soviet allies in Eastern Europe. "This is exactly what happened: as soon as the missiles were withdrawn, Eastern Europe joined NATO," Interfax quoted him as saying. He also complained that Russia did not respond to his appeal to form a joint front against NATO. "The result was military intervention by the alliance in the Balkans," Lukashenka concluded. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 5, 1999)

**YOUNG BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST SEEKS POLITICAL ASYLUM IN POLAND** - Uladzimir Antonau, an activist of the opposition Youth Front, has requested political asylum in Poland, BelaPAN reported on 4 August. In a public statement, Antonau explained his move by pointing to the "authoritarian rule that is strengthening in Belarus." This year, Antonau was arrested twice for his participation in opposition protest actions and was expelled from a Minsk university. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 5, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OFFICIAL CRITICIZES CIS EXECUTIVE**

**SECRETARY** -Syarhey Posakhau, Belarus's permanent representative to the CIS, told journalists in Minsk on 5 August that CIS Executive Secretary Yurii Yarov is unwilling to tackle urgent problems facing his secretariat, including the energy crisis and falling trade turnover between CIS countries. According to Posakhau, Yarov's current duties are "issuing, filing, and storing pieces of paper," Interfax reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 6, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA CALLS BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT 'DESTROYERS'** -Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 5 August that the recent congress of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front gathered "destroyers" who "are ready to turn [Belarus] upside down," Belarusian Television reported. He added that he will "most likely" have the records of the congress published ad verbatim. If people could listen to the congress, their "ears would close up [out of fear]," Lukashenka noted. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 6, 1999)

**TWO BELARUSIAN ANARCHISTS FINED FOR 'SOLIDARITY' WITH PROTESTERS** - A Minsk court fined Syarhey Shmyalou and Vadzim Kastsyukevich 20 million Belarusian rubles ($74) each for taking part in an unsanctioned protest rally (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 28 July 1999), RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 6 August. Shmyalou and Kastsyukevich had argued that they were at the place of the rally only after the protesters had dispersed. The court failed to prove that the accused had participated in the protest, but the judge argued that by going to the site of the protest and by speaking in Belarusian in the courtroom, they had demonstrated their solidarity with those protesting against the ruling regime. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, August 9, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER FEARS RETURNING HOME** -Syamyon Sharetski, chairman of the disbanded Supreme Soviet, told *"Lietuvos Rytas"* that he would be immediately imprisoned if he returned to Belarus from Lithuania, BNS reported on 9 August. Sharetski arrived in Vilnius last month out of fear he would be persecuted in Belarus. The Lithuanian authorities have provided Sharetski with an escort of three guards and a car. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 10, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION EMPOWERS SUPREME SOVIET TO TALK WITH REGIME** - Leaders of seven major opposition parties on 10 August signed a memorandum on the planned talks with the government over the 2000 parliamentary elections. BelaPAN quoted an unnamed oppositionist as saying that the memorandum empowers the Supreme Soviet to approve an opposition delegation to the talks and to hold negotiations. The document stresses that the Supreme Soviet is the democratically elected and internationally recognized legislature of Belarus. RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported that the Belarusian Popular Front and the Social Democratic Party Narodnaya Hramada signed the memorandum but expressed reservation about the transfer to the Supreme Soviet of full powers to negotiate with the regime. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 11, 1999)

**FORMER BELARUSIAN PREMIER DEFIES LUKASHENKA FROM JAIL** - Former Premier Mikhail Chyhir, who was jailed at the end of March on charges of "grand larceny," has sent an open letter to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, BelaPAN reported on 10 August. According to that letter, Lukashenka's recent public accusation that Chyhir committed multiple thefts is a "lie." Chyhir demanded that he be officially indicted, adding that he is guilty only "of trusting Lukashenka in July 1994 and of agreeing to head the government." Chyhir also rejected a recent offer from the authorities to make a public demonstration of repentance. He said he will not appeal to Lukashenka to be pardoned even if he has to remain in prison for seven years (Lukashenka recently pledged to stay in power until 2006). (RFE/RL Newsline, August 11, 1999)

**OSCE OKAYS BELARUSIAN SUPREME SOVIET AS OPPOSITION MOUTHPIECE** - Hans Georg Wieck, head of the OSCE monitoring and consultation group in Minsk, has approved the Belarusian opposition parties' decision to empower the Supreme Soviet to form an opposition delegation and to hold negotiations with the regime, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 11 August. Supreme Soviet deputy Anatol Lyabedzka told RFE/RL that the opposition delegation will have six members and will be officially approved at a Supreme Soviet session in September. According to Wieck, the government has already formed its delegation to the talks with the opposition. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 12, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST BARRED FROM GOING ABROAD** - The Minsk City Executive Committee has revoked the permit to travel abroad included in the passport of Viktar Hanchar, first deputy speaker of the opposition Supreme Soviet, BelaPAN reported on 11 August. Hanchar told BelaPAN that this decision is connected with a lawsuit brought against him this spring for "usurping official powers." Hanchar organized the shadow presidential elections in Belarus as the head of the opposition Central Electoral Commission. Now he is involved in organizing negotiations between the opposition and the authorities on the 2000 parliamentary elections. "The authorities are very afraid of the preparations for my official visits to a number of countries and . . . do everything possible to prevent those visits," Hanchar commented. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 12, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN ECONOMY GROWS, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL DATA** -The Ministry of Statistics and Analysis has reported that GDP in January-July 1999 increased by 1 percent, compared with the same period last year, BelaPAN reported on 11 August. The industrial production in this period increased by 6.5 percent, while the agricultural production shrunk by 9.9 percent. Inflation in the first seven months of this year reached 97.2 percent. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 12, 1999)

**WORLD BANK SAYS BELARUS LOSING TIME ON REFORM** - Serhiy Kulyk, the World Bank's permanent representative in Minsk, told journalists on 12 August that the "time credit" for implementing necessary market reforms in Belarus is shrinking, BelaPAN reported. Commenting on his meeting with Belarusian Premier Syarhey Linh this week, Kulyk said he informed Linh about the World Bank's stance on cooperation with Belarus. According to Kulyk, the bank will finance various projects only after the government has liberalized its monetary and pricing policies. Kulyk also noted that Belarus's social policy needs to be reoriented toward a "targeted support" approach since many of the state's social expenditures seem unjustified. He added, however, that the bank does not intend to dictate what economic course Belarus must adopt. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 13, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT FORMS TEAM FOR TALKS WITH OPPOSITION** - Alyaksandr Lukashenka has formed a group to discuss with political parties and public organizations preparations for the 2000 parliamentary elections, Belarusian Television reported on 13 August. The group is headed by presidential aide Mikhail Sazonau, who said the consultations will begin later this week. Meanwhile, Lukashenka has said the opposition Supreme Soviet is a "rotten" group of some 30 former deputies who do not represent "the opposition as such." According to him, the authorities are obliged to talk with representatives of "some 10 percent of the population," which, in his opinion, currently constitutes the opposition in Belarus. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 16, 1999)

**OPPOSITION HAGGLES OVER ITS REPRESENTATION.** - The memorandum empowering the Supreme Soviet to form an

opposition delegation that will hold talks with the regime under the aegis of the OSCE has caused protests among opposition parties. Social Democratic Party leader Mikalay Statkevich told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 13 August that his party did not agree to delegate full powers to the Supreme Soviet with regard to the talks. Liberal Democratic Party leader Syarhey Haydukevich, who did not sign the memorandum, appealed to the OSCE to hold a dialogue in Belarus in accordance with the principles laid down at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly session in St. Petersburg on 10 July. According to Haydukevich, the opposition should be represented by leaders of opposition parties and NGOs, not by the Supreme Soviet alone. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 16, 1999)

**OSCE SAYS LUKASHENKA SHOULD NOT PICK OPPOSITION DIALOGUE PARTNERS** - Adrian Severin, head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's group for Belarus, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 16 August that neither the OSCE nor Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has the right to select which oppositionists participate in the talks that are planned to take place under the aegis of the OSCE on the 2000 parliamentary elections in Belarus. Severin was responding to Lukashenka's statement that the Supreme Soviet--which was chosen by opposition parties as their mouthpiece at the talks--does not represent the country's opposition. "From the point of view of democratic principles, we cannot accept as reasonable to exclude anybody from the dialogue," Severin noted. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 17, 1999)

**HALF OF MINSK RESIDENTS AGAINST BELARUSIAN-RUSSIAN UNION.** - A poll conducted by BelaPAN among 600 Minsk residents in mid-August showed that more than 51 percent of respondents would vote against the creation of a union state of Belarus and Russia if a referendum were held on the issue. Thirty-one percent would vote for the union state and 11 percent would abstain, while 7 percent said they were undecided. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 18, 1999)

**ALREADY SEALED BY LUKASHENKA.** -The trial of former Agricultural Minister Vasil Lyavonau, who was arrested in 1997 on charges of corruption, began at the Supreme Court on 17 August. Lyavonau is charged with embezzlement, bribe-taking, exceeding his authority, organizing a criminal group, and owning illegal arms. He told the court that he does not believe in a fair trial because his fate has already been decided by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. "I am innocent but I realize that this is of no significance for the judges because I am actually being tried by Lukashenka himself," Lyavonau said, adding that Lukashenka has publicly called him a criminal on at least two occasions. Lyavonau added that he wants to use the trial to record for posterity the absurdity of the charges brought against him. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 18, 1999)

**BELARUS AGAIN LOSES 'BATTLE FOR HARVEST'** - Premier Syarhey Linh on 18 August informed President Alyaksandr Lukashenka that this year's harvest will be smaller than last year's because of "unfavorable weather and other objective reasons," Belarusian Television reported. Belarus will thus be forced to buy grain abroad. The report gave no figures. Last year, Belarus harvested some 5 million tons of grain, down from 6 million tons in 1997. Linh and Lukashenka noted that the lower grain yield means that budget expenditures will have to be reduced in all areas, except the social sphere. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 19, 1999)

**MINSK OSCE MISSION HEAD OUTLINES POLITICAL DIALOGUE GOALS** - Hans Georg Wieck, head of the OSCE monitoring and consultative group in Minsk, published an article in the 18 August *"Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta"* outlining the OSCE's expectations of the planned talks between the authorities and the opposition in Belarus. According to Wieck, the talks should aim at "seeking sufficient common grounds for the adoption of a law on holding free and fair elections, ensuring access of the opposition to the media, and creating a parliament with significant functions and powers." (RFE/RL Newsline, August 19, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION WANTS SECURITY GUARANTEES FOR RETURNEES.** - The Belarusian opposition parties involved in the preparation of a political dialogue with the authorities are to create four experts groups. The parties pledged on 19 August to propose candidates for the opposition negotiation team by the end of this month. They also made the talks conditional on the authorities' providing security guarantees to political refugees who left Belarus from 1996-1999 and decide to return home now. Another condition, laid down by the opposition a week earlier, is that the opposition be given access to the state media. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 20, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT TO MEET OPPOSITION 'WITHIN FRAMEWORK' OF 1996 BASIC LAW.** - Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 20 August said he is ready to hold a dialogue with political parties and public associations on the "improvement of the election legislation within the framework of the constitution currently in force," Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka repeated his earlier pledge to hold "free and fair parliamentary elections in 2000" while taking into account "opinions of all political forces" in Belarus. This means that Lukashenka intends to organize elections to the National Assembly, which he created following the 1996 controversial referendum on the constitution. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 23, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER SAYS LUKASHENKA'S ACTS ILLEGAL** -Syamyon Sharetski, speaker of the opposition Supreme Soviet, said in Vilnius on 23 August that all documents signed by Lukashenka after 20 July are illegal since Lukashenka's legitimate term expired on that date, BelaPAN reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 23, 1999)

**DIM PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN BELARUS** -Anatol Lyabedzka, head of the opposition delegation for talks with the authorities, told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service on 23 August that the political dialogue in Belarus "may come to a halt even without having started." Lyabedzka was commenting on President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's statement last week that the authorities want to talk with a broad spectrum of public organizations on holding parliamentary elections in 2000 in accordance with the 1996 constitution (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 23 August 1999). There has been no response from the OSCE Minsk group to Lukashenka's announcement. OSCE Minsk group head Hans Georg Wieck announced previously that the planned talks should aim at electing a parliament "with significant functions and powers" (RFE/RL Newsline, August 24, 1999).

**BELARUSIAN WORKERS STRIKE OVER UNPAID WAGES** - Two strikes over unpaid wages began this week in Mahileu Oblast, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 24 August. Some 2,000 workers at the tractor components plant in Babruysk stopped work on 23 August, demanding wage arrears for June and July. The same day, four workers of the Invest-Dom enterprise in Mahileu went on strike, also over wage arrears. According to Belapan, their action has the "moral" support of the 200-strong labor force. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 25, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION DEFINES POSITION FOR TALKS WITH REGIME** - At a 25 August meeting of opposition parties, the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) proposed two preconditions for the OSCE-mediated talks with the authorities, RFE/RL Belarusian Service reported. First, during the preparations for

the talks, it wants the authorities to stop any activities aimed at uniting Belarus and Russia. Second, it wants a deadline set for completing the negotiation process in order to prevent the authorities from carrying on an "endless imitation of the talks." Meanwhile, OSCE Minsk mission head Hans Georg Wieck has said the negotiation initiative "faces significant difficulties." Wieck was commenting on Minsk's stance that the talks should be conducted on the basis of the political status quo established by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka after the 1996 referendum. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 26, 1999)

**ABA HONORS BELARUS HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER** - Leading Belarusian civil rights attorney Vera Stremkovskaya received the Human Rights Award of the American Bar Association on 10 August. Each year ABA honors a foreign colleague who suffered reprisals for civil rights work. "This award recognizes the extreme risk lawyers like Stremkovskaya face when standing up for fundamental rights," said Robert O. Weiner, of the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, a New York-based NGO (RFE/RL WATCHLIST, August 26, 1999)

**AUTHORITIES CAN'T FIND ZAKHARENKO?** - Belarusian law enforcement agencies have made no effort to find Yuri Zakharenko, former minister of the interior, who disappeared on 7 May, charged his wife Olga and their daughter Elena at a press conference on 10 August. They said that the Prosecutor General's office informed them that it is premature to bring a criminal case against Zakharenko's abductors as the evidence is insufficient that a crime has been committed. Oleg Volchek, chairman of the Public Committee on the Disappearance of Zakharenko, said that police barred his committee from distributing Zakharenko's photograph, took no interest in evidence gathered, and failed to interview witnesses to the abduction. ( RFE/RL WATCHLIST, August 26, 1999)

**BELARUS SAYS OPPOSITIONIST WORSENING TIES WITH LITHUANIA** -The Belarusian Foreign Ministry on 26 August said that the activities of Syamyon Sharetski, speaker of the opposition Supreme Soviet, "are aimed at further deepening the confrontation in Belarusian society and worsening Belarusian-Lithuanian relations," Belarusian Television reported. Sharetski fled to Vilnius in July, saying it was not safe for him to remain in Belarus. Sharetski announced this week that all documents signed by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka after 20 July are illegal because Lukashenka's legitimate term has ended. According to the ministry, Sharetski's announcement is "illegal" and "provocative" and aims at impeding the OSCE-mediated "constructive dialogue" between the authorities and the opposition. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 27, 1999)

**WILL FORMER BELARUSIAN PREMIER BE RELEASED FROM JAIL?** -Mikhail Sazonau, head of the government delegation for the talks with the opposition, told oppositionist Anatol Lyabedzka on 26 August that former Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir's release from jail "could become a gesture of good will" on the part of the authorities ahead of the talks, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. According to an RFE/RL correspondent in Minsk, Lukashenka authorized Sazonau's meeting with Lyabedzka, which suggests that the idea of freeing Chyhir may come from the president himself. Chyhir, who challenged the Lukashenka regime by participating in the opposition presidential elections this year, was arrested in late April on charges of embezzlement. No official charges have been brought against him so far. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 27, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN TRADE UNIONS ANNOUNCE NATIONWIDE PROTEST** - The Federation of Trade Unions will hold a nationwide protest on 30 September over deteriorating living standards, Belarusian media reported on 27 August. Valyantsina Palevikova, secretary of the federation, told "Zvyazda" that the government has failed to comply with its pledge to increase real wages in 1999. According to Palevikova, those wages dropped 4 percent from January-June, instead of increasing by 34 percent, as the government had promised. Trade unionists said on 27 August that the federation also opposes the presidential decree on labor discipline, which introduces limited-duration contracts for all categories of Belarusian workers. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 30, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER IN LITHUANIA GETS MORE SUPPORT** - Former Supreme Soviet Chairman Stanislau Shushkevich, World Association of Belarusians Chairman Radzim Haretski, and Ivonka Survilla, chairwoman of the emigre Belarusian Democratic Republic, signed a document in Vilnius on 27 August repeating that Alyaksandr Lukashenka's term as Belarus's legitimate president is over. The document also pledges support for Supreme Soviet Chairman Syamyon Sharetski, who is now living in Lithuania and who de jure became Belarusian head of the state on 20 July. Meanwhile, Sharetski has unofficially met with German and U.S. diplomats in Vilnius, seeking to enlist their support in his effort to undermine Lukashenka's presidency in the international arena, dpa reported on 27 August. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 30, 1999)

**BELARUS TO HAVE GOVERNMENT IN EXILE?** - Exiled Supreme Soviet Chairman Syamyon Sharetski, who is Belarusian head of state under the 1994 constitution, proposed on 30 August that the Supreme Soviet approve former Premier Mikhail Chyhir as head of a new government, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Chyhir remains in jail, having been arrested on charges of embezzlement in March. No Western country has so far taken a position on Sharetski's powers following the end of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's legitimate term as of 20 July. Meanwhile, Russian President Boris Yeltsin on 30 August congratulated Lukashenka on his 45th birthday and assured him that Moscow opposes "all Western and certain neighboring countries' attempts to put pressure on Belarus," according to Interfax. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 31, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONISTS SAY KUCHMA SHOULD NOT MEET LUKASHENKA** -A group of prominent Belarusian oppositionists has appealed to Ukrainian political parties and organizations to "remind" Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma that Lukashenka is now a "usurper," Belapan reported on 30 August. The appeal calls Kuchma's planned meeting with Lukashenka in Belarus a "political and moral mistake. To support Lukashenka means to approve the restoration of the Russian empire," the Belarusian oppositionists conclude. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 31, 1999)

**BELARUS'S 1999 HARVEST FAR BELOW TARGET** - Belarus's harvest is "significantly lower than was planned," Belarusian Television reported on 30 August. According to the Agricultural Ministry, the country has harvested 3.7 million tons of grain, down from some 5 million last year and far below the 1999 planned target of 6 million tons. The average grain yield was 1.73 tons per hectare. (RFE/RL Newsline, August 31, 1999)

**'NEW GENERATION' TO LEAD WAY WITHIN BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION?** -Younger members of Belarusian opposition parties have pledged to join forces to launch a large-scale campaign against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime this fall, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 31 August. The oppositionists of the "new generation," as they call themselves, said they intend to organize a 100,000-strong "freedom march" on 17 October. "An agreement has been reached among those who can actually influence specific events. Not in terms of political declarations, but in terms of specific work methods--newspapers, structures, money," Viktar

Ivashkevich, one of the "new generation" oppositionists, told RFE/RL. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 1, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA STRESSES ECONOMY IN BELARUS-RUSSIA UNION** -Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 1 September admitted that the current draft treaty on a union with Russia does not provide for a full union state, Reuters reported. "There is no union state [in the draft], but this is what we, or rather Russia, can afford today," he said. Lukashenka stressed that economics rather than politics should form the backbone of the future treaty. "Primarily, equal conditions for companies and organizations must be put into practice," Interfax quoted Lukashenka as saying. The Belarusian president added that a supplement of a "purely economic nature" was drawn up for the treaty and that the supplement "must be reflected in Russian law the way it was done in Belarus." (RFE/RL Newsline, September 2, 1999

**BELARUS INTRODUCES 5 MILLION RUBLE NOTE** - Beginning 6 September, Belarus's National Bank will put into circulation a banknote worth 5 million Belarusian rubles or some $10, according to the street exchange rate. Four months ago, the bank introduced a banknote worth 1 million rubles. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 2, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES START TALKS WITH OPPOSITION** - Four- strong delegations representing the authorities and the opposition began consultations at the OSCE Minsk mission office on 3 September, Belapan reported. The talks are focusing on the opposition's access to the state media. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 3, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PICKETS RUSSIAN EMBASSY OVER INTEGRATION** - Some 20 members of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) picketed the Russian Embassy in Minsk for four days last week, protesting official Minsk's integration policy. "The Belarusians have made their choice and do not want to return to the Eurasian empire anymore. There is no place in Russia for Belarusian culture and spirituality in general," the protesters said in a petition to the Russian government. In another petition, the BNF urged the U.S. government not to allow the "incorporation" of Belarus into Russia. "A loss of our independence would lead to disastrous consequences in the center of Europe," the document warned. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 6,1999)

**BALTIC WAVES RADIO FOR BELARUS TO LAUNCH IN JANUARY** - The non-governmental Baltic Waves radio station will start broadcasting from Vilnius next January. At the end of August, the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission granted Baltic Waves a license, which allows it to broadcast radio programs in Belarusian and in the other languages of Lithuania's national minorities until the end of 2000. As the programs will be heard in the neighboring states, the Belarusian authorities earlier voiced deep dissatisfaction over Lithuania's plans to air programs for national minorities. The radio station was funded by a NGO, which received £30,000 ($50,000) in financial assistance from the UK-based Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (ILHR, Belarus Update, September 6, 1999)

**RUSSIA'S PUTIN IN BELARUS TO DISCUSS INTEGRATION** - Russian Premier Vladimir Putin arrived in Minsk on 8 September to chair a session of the Belarus-Russian Union Executive Committee. "Regardless of any domestic problems in Russia and regardless of who heads the government, Russia's policy toward Belarus remains unchanged," BelaPAN quoted Putin as saying on his arrival. It is expected that Putin will discuss economic integration issues with Premier Syarhey Linh and a draft union treaty with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 8, 1999)

**BELARUS-RUSSIA UNION TREATY BECOMING MORE REMOTE PROSPECT** - After meeting with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Minsk on 8 September, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin intimated that reaching agreement on a Belarus-Russia union treaty could take more time than initially thought. "I hope the signing of the treaty on creating a union state of Belarus and Russia will take place before Russia's presidential elections," Putin said. Those elections are expected in June 2000. Last December, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Lukashenka pledged to finalize a Russian-Belarusian union state this year. Putin also said that some legal issues concerning the union state require more work. He added that a draft treaty will soon be submitted to public discussion but that such a discussion will not involve a referendum. "If Russia is not ready for radical steps..., let us sign a moderate variant of the treaty," Belarusian Television quoted Lukashenka as saying. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 9, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN WORKERS PROTEST PRESIDENTIAL DECREES** - Some 6,000 employees of the Belaruskaliy producer of potash fertilizers in Salihorsk, Minsk Oblast, held a protest rally on 8 September. The workers of Belarus's largest exporter, which employs some 19,500 people, were protesting presidential decrees on labor discipline and pensions, which they said "encroach upon the workers' rights," Belapan reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 9, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MARKS ANNIVERSARY OF MOSCOW DEFEAT** - A 1,000-strong opposition meeting in Minsk on 8 September marked Military Glory Day, which commemorates the anniversary of the Battle of Orsha in 1514, at which 30,000 troops of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania defeated a 80,000-strong army of the Muscovite state. The event was sanctioned by the authorities, but in a move frequently evident at opposition gatherings, electricity was cut off to the meeting site, disrupting a rock concert that was part of the commemoration. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 9, 1999)

**NOT INVITED** - In response to not being invited to an international conference in Yalta, Ukraine, Alexander Lukashenko initially refused to grant Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus permission to fly over Belarusian air space. The permission was eventually granted. The conference of the Baltic and the Black Sea countries is being held as a continuation to a forum organized in Vilnius in 1997, when Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma proposed a similar presidential-level meeting in Yalta, to which the leader of Belarus was initially scheduled to be invited. But amidst recent international debates over the vague status of Lukashenko after his term in office expired two months ago, coordinators of the conference decided to withdraw his invitation. (ILHR, Belarus Update, September 9, 1999)

**CHARTER 97 REPRESENTATIVE, EU OFFICIAL DISCUSS SITUATION IN BELARUS** - On September 9, Alexander Silich, Charter 97 representative in Brussels, met Yan Marinus Wiersma, head of the EU delegation for Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, to inform him about the current political situation in Belarus and the recent negotiations between the authorities and the opposition. Wiersma expressed his solidarity with the democratic movement of Belarus and his readiness to support it. A preliminary agreement was reached to organize a series of meetings in Brussels between EU officials and members of the Belarusian opposition. (ILHR, Belarus Update, September 10, 1999)

**BELARUS SAYS UKRAINIAN RECALL OF INVITATION TO YALTA 'UNFRIENDLY'** - The Belarusian Foreign Ministry said on 9 September that Ukraine had made an "inconsistent" and "unfriendly" step by revoking an invitation to Belarus for the Yalta international conference on 10-11 September. According to the ministry, Ukraine took this step because Minsk has

"difficulties" in its relations with the EU. However, the ministry added, neither the EU nor the OSCE have discussed the list of Yalta conference participants with Ukraine, therefore Kyiv canceled Belarus's invitation completely on its own. The same day, UNIAN quoted Andriy Veselovskyy from Ukraine's Foreign Ministry as saying that Ukraine never issued an invitation to Belarus to participate in the Yalta forum. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 10, 1999)

**HARD-HIT BELARUS SEEKS IMF EMERGENCY LOAN** - Belarus, abandoned by Western creditors because of its slow reforms, plans to ask the IMF for a stabilization loan, Finance Minister Nikolai Korbut said on September 9. Belarus would ask the fund to approve a Contingency and Compensatory Fund Facility loan, usually granted at a low interest rate to nations where the economy is suffering due to external factors. Belarus's economy has been hit by a poor grain harvest and has also been feeling side effects from Russia's crippling financial crisis. "We will invite an IMF mission in September-October and will ask for this stabilization loan," Korbut said. He did not name the sum of money to be requested. "The country faces a poor harvest for a second year in a row and the situation in Russia, our main market, has not improved," he said. Minsk applied last year for a similar IMF loan worth $100 million, but the Fund refused to allocate the money, saying that Belarus's economic problems were largely due to slow reforms. The government maintains strict control of prices and wages, and subsidizes companies that it considers strategic with direct grants or soft loans. Barter trade prospers, while payments are thwarted by the complicated multiple exchange rate mechanism. The IMF last year recalled its resident representative from Belarus, protesting against the unwillingness of the authorities to respect reform programs which had been agreed upon. Korbut said, however, that Belarus had every right to ask for the favorable loan because of its paltry harvest. "The situation is complicated and we have gathered only a half of the planned harvest. But the current economic course has nothing to do with this," he said.(ILHR, Belarus Update, September 10, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA PLEDGES TO KEEP TRANQUILLITY 'BY ALL MEANS'** - "All the law enforcement bodies [in Belarus] are on alert," President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on 9 September, commenting on the Moscow blast. He added that the alert is connected not only with the situation in Russia. "There is no need to walk the streets, to roar, to shout, and to demand," Lukashenka said, referring to a trade union protest planned for 30 September. According to him, the protest is organized not by workers but by the "trade union functionaries" who have lost their "slice of bread." Lukashenka noted that he is watching over and controlling the situation in Belarus "in the most rigorous way," and pledged to maintain the "peace and accord in our country by all means." (RFE/RL Newsline, September 10, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CAN'T AGREE ON DELEGATION FOR TALKS** - Belarusian opposition parties on 9 September failed to approve a delegation for the planned OSCE-mediated negotiations with the authorities, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The difficulty lies in the fact that nine opposition parties are seeking to be represented in a six-member delegation. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 10, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA DECREES RESTRICTIONS ON RALLIES** -- Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has issued a decree "on measures to prevent emergencies during mass events." According to Belarusian Television, the decree was prompted by the 30 May stampede in a metro passageway in Minsk, which claimed 53 lives. The document prohibits holding rallies less than 200 meters away from metro stations and bans the sale of alcohol and beer within a 500 meter perimeter of a rally. The decree does not apply to official events organized on state holidays. According to Belarusian oppositionists, the decree intends to restrict opposition actions planned for this fall. Human rights activist Ales Byalatski told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service that the authorities may now designate remote places on the outskirts of Belarusian cities for opposition protest actions. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 13, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT TO RECONVENE CONGRESS IN OCTOBER** -- The Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) Board on 11 September decided to reconvene the BNF sixth congress on 30-31 October after the previous one failed to elect a BNF leadership on 1 August The board rejected a proposal by exiled BNF leader Zyanon Paznyak to divide the BNF into two allied organizations--a public movement and a political party--and hold their conventions separately. The session also invalidated Paznyak's directives to dismiss Lyavon Barshcheuski from the position of BNF acting chairman and to hold a separate congress of the BNF Party. However, some members of the BNF Board refused to register at the session and claimed that it lacked a quorum to adopt decisions. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 13, 1999)

**BELARUS TIGHTENS SECURITY AFTER MOSCOW BLAST** - The Interior Ministry on 13 September said it has taken special measures to protect Belarusian citizens in connection with the growing number of terrorist attacks in Russia. According to Belarusian Television, the police and Interior Ministry troops are concentrating on maintaining order and guaranteeing security at recreation areas and enterprises as well as on public transportation. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 14, 1999)

**U.S. AMBASSADOR TO MINSK RESUMES DUTIES AFTER 15 MONTHS** -Daniel Speckhard returned to his post in Belarus on 14 September after being recalled to protest his eviction from the ambassador's residence in June 1998. The U.S. State Department said Speckhard's return was made possible by Belarus's pledge to abide by the Vienna Convention and to compensate for losses suffered by the U.S. embassy as a result of Speckhard's eviction. "I'm very glad to return to Belarus--we have fallen in love [with the country]," Speckhard said at a Minsk airport. "Having Ambassador Speckhard back in Minsk will enable us more effectively to promote democracy and human rights, help those who support and work for the restoration of democratic rule, and promote other interests that we have in Belarus," the State Department noted. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 15, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA CANCELS HARVEST FESTIVALS** - Following a 15 September cabinet meeting devoted to the situation in the agricultural sector, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has decided to cancel the national harvest festival in Shklou and all oblast harvest festivals, Belarusian Television reported. The station cited no reason for this decision. Belarusian media reported earlier that this year's harvest totaled some 3.7 million tons, far below the projected target of 6 million tons. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 16, 1999)

**VILNIUS RADIO TO BROADCAST IN BELARUSIAN** - The non-governmental Baltic Waves radio station has received a license to broadcast in the languages, including Belarusian, spoken by Lithuania's ethnic minorities, beginning in January, according to a Baltic News Service report on 6 September. Listeners in neighboring states may also pick up the programs, and Belarusian authorities have already protested. (RFE/RL WATCHLIST Vol. 1, No. 35, 16 September 1999)

**DIASPORA CALLS FOR AID TO BELARUS TO DEPEND ON HUMAN RIGHTS** - On 15 September in New York, a session of the Presidium of the Belarusian Democratic Republic Council, which represents the Belarusian diaspora [sic] in the West, adopted an appeal "On Financial Assistance to the

Republic of Belarus," RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The forum urged Western governments and international financial organizations to make financial assistance to Belarus conditional on the country's compliance with international human rights standards, the release of political prisoners, and the return to the rule of law. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 16, 1999)

**PROMINENT BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST DISAPPEARS** - Viktar Hanchar, deputy chairman of the opposition Supreme Soviet, disappeared in the evening of 16 September in Minsk. Hanchar's wife told Belapan that he was driving home with a friend but failed to appear on time. She called the police and the KGB in Minsk inquiring about her husband but obtained no information on his whereabouts. Hanchar is the second major oppositionist to have vanished in Belarus this year. Former Interior Minister Yury Zakharanka went missing in May. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 17, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA PLEDGES TO END 'DEMOCRACY GAME'** - At the same meeting, Lukashenka attacked the Belarusian opposition for its alleged intent to derail the OSCE-mediated dialogue with the authorities. "We are playing democracy games with them...while they are working out mechanisms on how to disrupt this dialogue, how to sling mud at [OSCE mediator Hans Georg] Wieck," Lukashenka noted. He pledged to introduce "real democracy" instead of the "democracy games" which, in his opinion, are characteristic of Russia. According to Lukashenka, there may be only one reason for people's dissatisfaction with the Belarusian authorities--untimely payment of wages. He added that on other counts people trust the authorities and are confident that they will have "enough drinks, foodstuffs, heat, and hot water." (RFE/RL Newsline, September 17, 1999)

**LUKASHENKA ACCUSES WEST OF 'PROVOCATIONS' AGAINST BELARUS** - U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Daniel Speckhard on 17 September expressed concern over the disappearance of Belarusian oppositionist Viktar Hanchar. French envoy to Minsk Bernard Fossier noted that Hanchar's disappearance may "torpedo" the dialogue between the opposition and the authorities in Belarus, according to Belapan. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said the following day that "some politicians" tend to destabilize the situation in Belarus by resorting to "various provocations" and by claiming that Belarus is a totalitarian state where people disappear without trace, Belarusian Television reported. "I would ask the West to look for [those disappeared people] in the West before making loud statements," Lukashenka added. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 20, 1999)

**IMF SAYS BELARUS MUST IMPLEMENT REFORM TO COUNT ON MONEY** - IMF spokeswoman Kathleen White on 17 September said Belarus will have to lower inflation, liberalize its economy, and implement structural reforms before applying for IMF financial assistance, Reuters reported. White was responding to Belarusian National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich's announcement last week that Belarus will "insist and demand" that the IMF lend it $230 million. Prakapovich had said Minsk will ask for the money under emergency and stand-by loan programs because of this year's poor harvest and other problems. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 20, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES TO PROBE OPPOSITIONIST'S DISAPPEARANCE** - The Minsk City Prosecutor's Office has launched an investigation into the 16 September disappearance of Viktar Hanchar, deputy speaker of the opposition Supreme Soviet, and his friend Anatol Krasutski, Belarusian Television reported on 20 September. The station echoed allegations made by Ivan Pashkevich, deputy head of the presidential staff, that Hanchar staged his own disappearance to get more public attention. Earlier the same day, a group of Supreme Soviet deputies marched to the presidential administration building with a placard reading "Lukashenka! Bring back Hanchar!" Amnesty International, meanwhile, issued a statement saying that Hanchar and Krasutski "may be in solitary confinement where they will be at risk of torture, ill-treatment, or possible 'disappearance.' " (RFE/RL Newsline, September 21, 1999)

**U.S. CALLS ON BELARUS TO FIND MISSING DISSIDENTS** - "The United States is greatly concerned about this pattern of disappearances of opponents to [President Alyaksandr] Lukashenka's continued rule in Belarus," the U.S. State Department said in a 21 September statement. It was referring to the disappearances of Supreme Soviet Deputy Chairman Viktar Hanchar on 16 September, former Interior Minister Yury Zakharanka on 7 May, and former National Bank Chairwoman Tamara Vinnikava on 8 April. The State Department called on the Belarusian government "to do everything in its power to locate" the missing persons and ensure their safety. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 22, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT DECREES 1999 BUDGET ADJUSTMENT** - Alyaksandr Lukashenka has decreed changing the 1999 budget to increase revenues by 99.9 trillion Belarusian rubles ($348 million, according to the official exchange rate), BelaPAN reported on 22 September. Under the decree, the budget deficit is raised by 10.7 trillion rubles, up from 33.5 trillion rubles. The decree explains the need for the adjustment by citing "deviations from the planned macro-economic parameters as well as from [planned] revenues and expenditures in the national, oblast, and Minsk City budgets." (RFE/RL Newsline, September 23, 1999)

**BELARUS REPORTS CONTINUED ECONOMIC GROWTH** - According to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, Belarus's GDP in January-August rose 1.5 percent compared with the same period last year. Industrial output increased by 6.6 percent and agricultural output fell by 10.2 percent. Consumer prices rose 111.1 percent, while real incomes fell by 3 percent. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 23, 1999)

**ADAMKUS ON BELARUS** - This week, Lithuanian President Adamkus paid his first state visit to the Czech Republic for talks with President Vaclav Havel and other Czech leaders. While in Prague he visited RFE/RL's headquarters, where he spoke to foreign and domestic journalists. Turning to foreign policy issues, Adamkus noted that Lithuania's geo-political situation is very sensitive and its policy based on the EU's guidelines of recognizing states but not becoming internally involved in them. He said Lithuania is strongly committed to good working relations with its eastern neighbors, Russia and Belarus. Asked specifically about ties with Belarus, Adamkus replied: "I believe there is a very warm feeling [on the part of Lithuanians] toward the people of Belarus, but the difficulty we have right now is the very uncertain situation as to whom we should speak to, because the [Belarusian] people are divided on that issue. Legally they say that the present regime does not represent actually the people, it represents only the government, the bureaucracy. And of course this is not for us to decide; that's what makes things very difficult". (RFE/RL Newsline, September 23, 1999)

**EU URGES BELARUS TO FIND DISAPPEARED OPPOSITIONIST** - The EU on 23 September issued a statement calling on the Belarusian authorities to find opposition politician Viktar Hanchar, who disappeared along with a friend last week. The Belarusian Interior Ministry said the same day that the Prosecutor-General's Office has instigated criminal proceedings with regard to Hanchar's disappearance and suspects premeditated murder. The office opened a similar case on 21 September in connection with the disappearance of former Interior Minister Yury Zakharanka in May. The

Interior Ministry also reported that former National Bank chairwoman Tamara Vinnikava, who disappeared in April while under house arrest, is abroad, but her precise whereabouts are unknown. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 24, 1999)

**BELARUS TO IMPORT 1.5 MILLION TONS OF GRAIN THIS YEAR.** Deputy Premier Alyaksandr Papkou on 23 September said Belarus will have to import some 1.5 million tons of grain this year at an estimated cost of $100 million, Belapan reported. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 24, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT ACTIVISTS FORM NEW PARTY.** Activists of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) who support BNF exiled leader Zyanon Paznyak held a congress in Minsk on 26 September, Belapan reported. Delegates formed a Conservative Christian Party of the BNF and elected Zyanon Paznyak as its leader. The congress reflects the deepening split within the BNF, the most influential opposition group in Belarus. Another BNF faction, which is grouped around Lyavon Barshcheuski and Vintsuk Vyachorka, plans to elect its leadership on 30-31 October. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 27, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER FINED.** A Minsk court ordered the opposition newspaper *"Naviny"* and one of its editors to pay 15 billion Belarusian rubles ($52,000) in damages to State Security Secretary Viktar Sheyman, Belapan reported on 24 September. *"Naviny"* published an article earlier this month saying that Sheyman had built a luxurious house and risen from the rank of major to major general in five years. Sheyman denied both allegations and filed a libel suit against *"Naviny."* "We do not have such money. We will have to close our newspaper, and that's what the authorities are striving for," *"Naviny"* deputy chief editor Mikalay Khalezin commented. According to Khalezin, *"Naviny"* make a $2,700 profit each month. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 27, 1999)

**BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER TO APPEAR UNDER NEW NAME**- Law enforcement officials on 28 September seized from a Minsk printing house paper and other property belonging to the independent newspaper *"Naviny,"* Belapan reported. They explained their action by saying that a Minsk court ordered *"Naviny"* to pay 15 billion Belarusian rubles ($52,000) in damages to State Security Council Secretary ViktarSheyman (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 27 September 1999). "Sheyman does not need that money, he needs to close our newspaper, because we could pay the fine if we continued to publish and sell the newspaper," *"Naviny"* chief editor Pavel Zhuk commented. Zhuk added that the editorial office intends to print the last issue of *"Naviny"* on 29 September and resume publishing the newspaper under the name of *"Nasha svaboda"* (Our Freedom). "Naviny" appeared in fall 1997 as the successor to *"Svaboda,"* which had been banned by the authorities. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 29, 1999)

**FORMER BELARUSIAN PREMIER INDICTED AFTER SIX MONTHS IN JAIL** - Former Premier Mikhail Chyhir, arrested on 30 March on suspicion of grand larceny and abuse of office, has been indicted on charges of exceeding his authority, abusing office, and negligence, Belapan reported on 29 September. Investigators accuse Chyhir of issuing dubious credits when he headed a bank before becoming premier and of allowing a company to postpone paying customs duties when he headed the government from 1994-1996. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka publicly accused Chyhir of embezzling $10 million, but investigators could not confirm that allegation and withdrew the charge of grand larceny. (RFE/RL Newsline, September 30, 1999)

**BELARUS'S SHARETSKI DENIES HE MET WITH MISSING OPPOSITIONIST**- Supreme Soviet Chairman Syamyon Sharetski, currently living in exile in Vilnius, has denied a report in the state-run newspaper "Belorusskaya niva" that he has met with Viktar Hanchar since the latter's disappearance (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 28 September 1999), RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 29 September. In a reference to Lukashenka's praise for the Hitler regime in an interview with a German journalist in 1996, Sharetski commented that "Belorusskaya niva" serves the man who "once called Hitler his idol. Therefore, they do everything like Hitler did--they shamelessly lie." (RFE/RL Newsline, Sept.30, 1999)

# *MEDIA WATCH*

## PUBLICATIONS:

**Republic of Belarus: Violations of Academic Freedom,** by *Human Rights Watch*, July 1999

This 49-page report, researched and written by Malcolm Hawkes, Human Rights Watch researcher at its Moscow office, is a product of the writer's two research missions to Miensk and Horadnia (Grodno). The report is broken down into the following sections: Preface, Summary, Recommendations, Background, Reviving Soviet history, Institutional control, Students, Lecturers, Obsruction of private eduacational institutional, and Acknowledgments.

According to a HRW July 15 news release in Minsk, the report details how President Aleksandr Lukashenka's government has suppressed research on controversial topics, re-centralized academic decision-making, and maintained a ban on political activity on campuses. To achieve its ends, the government has employed systematic crackdown on political dissent on campus by targeting outspoken students and lecturers, threatening them with expulsion, often for their off-campus political activity.

"President Lukashenka is strangling intellectual life in Belarus," said Holly Cartner, executive director of the Europe and Central Asia Division of Human Rights Watch. "This drive for political control on campuses mirrors what he has done to the rest of civil society."

State university authorities issue reprimands and warnings to politically active lecturers, independent historians, and other academics. University employees who challenge the status quo are told to curtail political activities or change the focus of their academic enquiry.

State university administrators target research into politically sensitive issues, such as the Belarusian independence movement during the Soviet era, a theme that is seen to challenge state policy of integration with Russia and is actively dissuaded. "President Lukashenka has made his own historical interpretation a keystone of the government's integration policy," said Ms. Cartner. "Independent historians are today viewed in the same light as oppositionist politicians." In our opinion, the HWR report makes a valuable contribution to exposing the government's assault on academic institutions in Belarus. The report should serve as a useful guide to the Western academic community and political institutions in assessing the dangers of a dictatorship on a rampage to eradicate academic freedom.

The report is available at http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/belarus/ For a hard copy, contact Human Rights Watch, Publications Department, 350 Fifth Ave., 34th Floor, New York, NY 10118 or call (212) 290-4700.

## NEWS MEDIA

**End of Lukashenka's Term in Office** *(The Washington Post,* editorial "The Illegal President," July 22, 1999)

The editorial says that the leaders of post-Soviet republics found it easy at first to proclaim a new era of democracy. but now that their terms of office should be coming to an end, many of them are finding it more painful actually to let democracy take its course." A good example is Belarus, where the legal five-year term of President Alexander Lukashenko came to an end on July 20, " but Mr. Lukashenko shows no signs of vacatingthe presidential mansion any time soon."

The editorial says that the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe both said that Mr. Lukashenko can no longer be regarded as Belarus's legitimate leader. It quotes State Department spokesman James Rubin as saying that Mr. Lukashenko's legitimacy "can only be restored by free and fair democratic elections." In the view of the editorial, "the only European leaders expressing approval of Belarus's autocracy are Slobodan Milosevic . . . and Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his government, who welcome Mr. Lukashenko's pro Russia, anti-NATO stance."

"In the long run, though, an alliance with this small-time tyrant does Russia no good. It only serves to further isolate Russia from the West while undermining prospects for democracy in Russia itself. Vice President Gore, who holds his first official meetings with Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin next week [July 27], should make sure Belarus is on the agenda," concludes the editorial.

**Rather than Stepping down, Lukashenka Cracks down on Dissidents** *(The New York Times,* "'New President' of Belarus Flees the Crackdown on Dissidents," July 24, 1999)

The article reports that under the nation's first constitution, President Lukashenka's term in office would have expired on July 20. Lukashenka, however, nullified the constitution, disbanded the parliament and extended his own term by two years, to 2001.

Semyon Sharetsky was the speaker of the Belarusian Parliament in 1996 when Lukashenka disbanded the parliament. The article says that on July 20, 35 members of the old parliament decreed that Sharetsky was acting president under the old constitution, which provides for the speaker to fill any presidential vacancy until new presidential elections are held. Following the parliament's action, Sharetsky fled to Lithuania with the help from former Speaker Stanislau Shushkevich, "apparently fearing for his safety during a new government crackdown on critics," says the article. "I personally was trying to get him out of here in order to insure his safety," the article quotes Shushkevich.

The article reports that the police have cracked down on protests by dissidents several times that week. On July 20, a peaceful march by about 1,000 protesters was followed by the arrest of a dozen dissidents and the opening of a criminal investigation of Irina Khalip, the editor of a popular opposition newspaper, *Imia.* On July 21, the police dogged an unauthorized protest by some 2,500 people in downtown Minsk's October Square and arrested 53 more critics, including some members of the disbanded parliament. And on July 22, the police arrested a leading human rights activist, Valery Shchukin, as he stood with the head of the group monitoring human rights for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

---

**Belarusians in Vilnius Protest against Lukashenka** *"The "Baltic Times"* ("Lukashenko denounced by Lithuania, EU" August 4, 1999)

The article states that "If the version of reality to which Lithuania, the United States and the European Union subscribe, Belarus was officially without a head of state on July 21. Current President Alexander Lukashenko's term, they say, finished July 21." The article reports that a joint statement from the Lithuanian president's office and the foreign ministry said that "Lithuania joins the efforts by the international community to develop a dialogue with Belarus on consolidating respect for human rights in that country, the freedom of the press and the principles of free elections." It also demands that Belarusian authorities release political prisoners and organize free parliamentary elections in 2000. The statement expressed hope that Belarus "will make democratic changes and will occupy its place in the family of European nations".

According to the article, on July 21, near the Belarusian embassy in Vilnius, three local organizations of ethnic Belarusians organized a protest demonstration against Lukashenko's staying in power.The organizers were the Belarusian Cultural Society of Lithuania, the Belarusian Language Society and the Vilnius-based center Democracy for Belarus. Protesters held the old Belarusian white-red-white flags and coat of arms. The posters said "Enough," and "Belarus is not a Russian province."

The article reports that Fiodar Niunka, chairman of the Belarusian Cultural Society of Lithuania, said that "The demonstration shows that there are democratic forces that want the resignation of Lukashenko," that "Lukashenko caused more harm to Belarus than Stalin." He accused Lukashenko of implementing anti-Belarusian policies and emphasized that everybody who speaks Belarusian is condemned as a "nationalist." Almost all education is conducted in Russian in Belarus. "Five years ago, 74 percent of pupils of Minsk were studying the Belarusian language from the first grade. Now this figure is only 1 percent," said Niunka. Schools with Belarusian language teaching remain mostly in villages. There is not a single university in which courses are conducted in Belarusian, according to Niunka.

The protesters sent an open letter to Lukashenko which criticized his wish to "recreate the U.S.S.R " The letter also stated that Lukashenko wants "to take way from Belarusians everything that is Belarusian." Belarusian embassy employees did not show up at the rally and none commented on the demonstration, notes the article.

..

---

# LETTERS

### Missing Coverage of Belarusian Culture, Literature

Please accept my belated congratulation on the tenth anniversary of BR that passed last July. Your bulletin has played an important role in keeping informed those who are professionally interested in Belarus, as well as those, uninitiated, who for the first time learned about the existence of other nations on the vast territory of the former Soviet Union.

There have been enormous changes in the field of information flow since 1989, when the first issue of Belarusian Review appeared. My recent Internet print-off, "Belarusian Web Sites," enumerates dozens upon dozens of sites providing current data on Belarus, discussing events in the country,

and chatting about the Belarusian nation's destiny. It is simply impossible to read and digest everything that appears on Web sites generated both in Minsk and many Western cities. The abundance of electronic information on Belarus, I must say, in no way diminishes the significance of your publication. Rather to the contrary. In my opinion, BR provides the most extensive and highly reliable coverage of present-day Belarus. With an important exception - discussions of Belarusian literature and culture, that is. This must be the result of a lack of contributors rather than the Editor's conscious oversight.

My perusal of the past issues of BR reveals a paucity of discussion of literary and cultural issues. As a researcher in East European affairs, I would like to know, for example, who are the foremost writers of modern Belarus? What most burning issues do they tackle in their works? What changes have occurred in Belarusian culture since the declaration of independence? I read in BR about Russification and human rights abuses, but what about achievements of the Belarusian creative intelligentsia? I wish I could see some answers to these and related questions to be able to better understand the country. Would it be possible to engage someone in Minsk to present a tour d'horison of contemporary Belarusian literature or music or theater? Perhaps a small royalty will encourage such a person to do the work. The dollar is a mighty currency in Belarus. During my recent visit to Hrodna, Slonim and Miensk, I met enough people who could easily write a good review article for your bulletin. When I read the Russian-language Web sites supplying the latest news from Belarus, I often think that it would be nice to have BR on the Internet. The ten-year BR archive would contain enough material for an entire monograph on Belarus.

As you began the second decade of your fine and, I am sure, not easy work, considering the amount of labor that goes into preparation of each issue of BR, may I wish you all the best in the years ahead.

*Samuel M. Vilcy*
*New York,*
*N.Y., USA*

## Western Concerns about Belarus

I have been asked to respond to your letter to Deputy Secretary Talbott of July 26 regarding Belarus. We share a number of your concerns. Lukashenko's lack of respect for human rights has long been an impediment in our bilateral relations. We cnntinue to emphasize the need to abide by international human rights standards for Belarus to end its self imposed isolation from the international community. We will also continue to urge the government to begin a serious and constructive dialogue with the opposition toward reestablishing democratic rule.

While we do not in principle oppose integration among the states of the former Soviet Union, we believe that this process must be voluntary, reflect the will of the people as expressed in open, democratic elections, and not erect barriers to integration with the wider community of nations. The absence of democracy in Belarus raises serious doubts as to whether continued integration with Russia is truly reflective of what the Belarusian people desire.

Our concerns about Belarus were discussed during the course of Russian Prime Minister Stepashin's visit to Washington last month. These issues will, of course, also continue to be a regular part of our dialogue with the Belarusian government.

*Ross L. Wilson*
*Acting Ambassador-at-Large and*
*Special Adviser to the Secretary on the*
*New Independent States*
*United States Department of State*
*Washington, USA*

*******

Thank you for your letter of 12 July to the Prime Minister enclosing a copy of the Summer edition of Belarusian Review and expressing your views on the political scene. As the Desk Officer dealing with Belarus, I have been asked to reply.

I read the edition with interest and noted your points on the continuing human rights problems, the significance of 20 July and the tragedy at the Nimega subway station in Minsk. As I am sure you are aware, the UK, together with our EU partners, continue to closely monitor the situation in Belarus and to press for improvements on human rights and dialogue with the opposition.

*Helen M. Arbon*
*Eastern Department*
*Foreign & Commonwealth Office*
*London, UK*




**Annual subscription rate for 1999:** $40 for individuals, $60 for institutions
Make your check or money order in U.S. funds payable to:
**Belarusian Review and mail to: BR, P.O. Box 10353, Torrance, CA 90505, USA**

Beginning with summer 1999 (BR 11-2) **annual subscription rates in Europe are:**
1000 Kc in Czech Republic, 45 CHF in Switzerland, 50 DM in Germany
18 GBP in United Kingdom, or EUR 28, elsewhere $30
Make your check or money order in these currencies payable to:

**Spolek SKARYNA (Belarusian Review), Na Zatlanace 5/2174**
**150 00 Praha 5, Czech Republic**